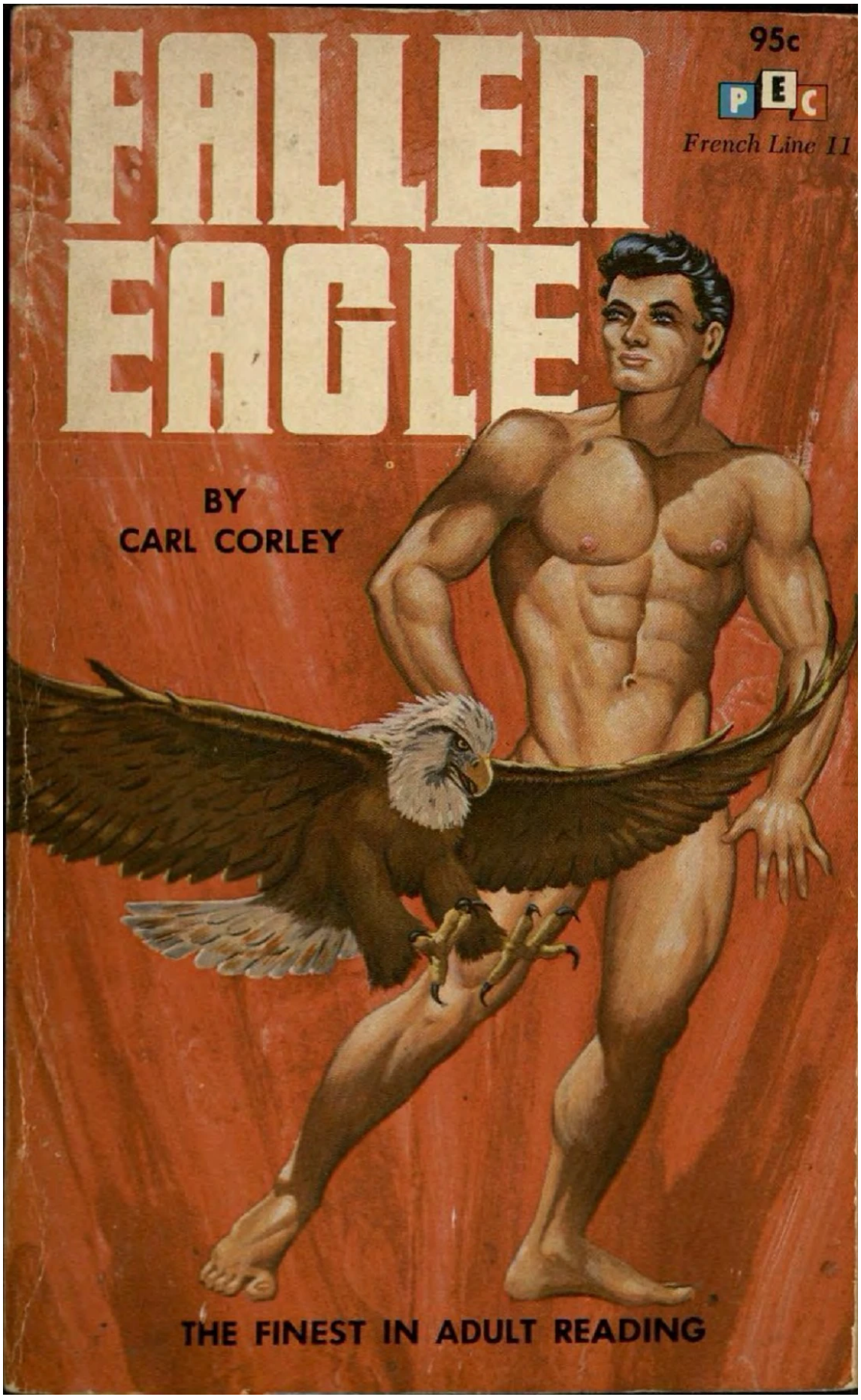
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BY
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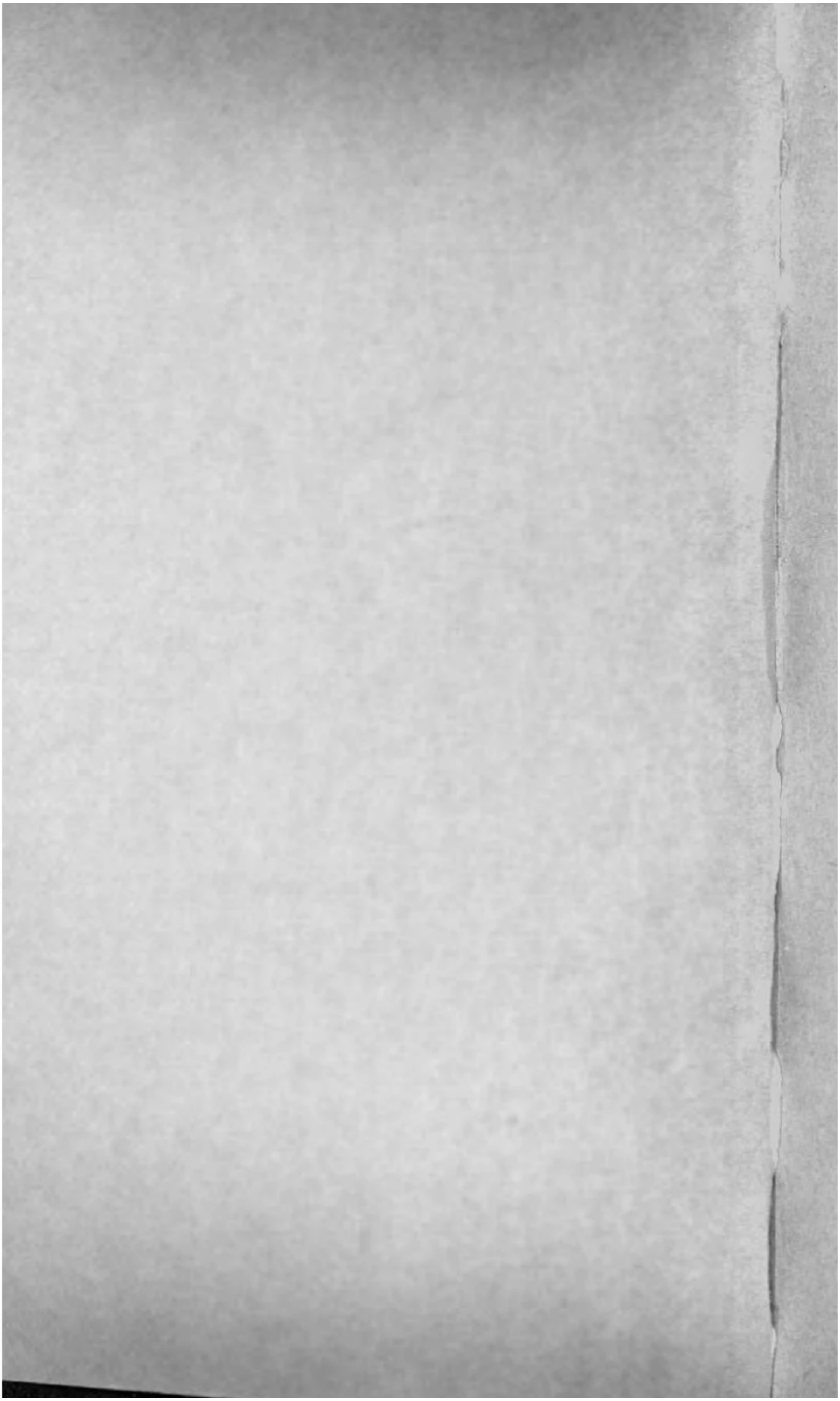

FALLEN EAGLE

by

CARL CORLEY

Natural quality is so ready to vanish,
Artificial quality, so prone to persist.
The Author

All characters and situations in this book are fictitious.

A PEC FRENCH LINE NOVEL

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COMING THROUGH THE RYE

I am born. I begin the story of my life by saying I am born, for after all, that is the beginning of my existence. I was flung from my mother's womb that dark stormy night in December like a planet bursting forth from the mother sun to whirl like a delirious runaway until it has found its orbit. I put to shore on this world and drifted out into the shoreless ocean of life to anchor here and there until I could discover my Lucky Island. I am still searching—after forty-five years. I doubt if there was anything about my birth that was miraculous, or something inspired by God, or of that divine spirit linked with birth. It was a gory affair, as all births since Cain and Abel. If there was anything divine about my being born it was in the heart and soul of my mother. She has been the only divine thing in the entirety of my life, the only being I have ever known who lived as near the rules of Christian faith as is possible for any person to live. Not that she was basically religious. It was the love in her that was divine, that was something utterly sacred to me. Her love was sincere. And I have never known an honest affection in any other woman.

Under the sign of Sagittarius, the ninth sign, I was born small of stature and the small are hearty. They have to be in order to survive. Yet to a degree I was a child of circumstance. Despite my heartiness I found the road of life hard, encrusted with many pitfalls, uncertainties, and steep defiles. I was that "in between child", a brother five years older than I and two five years younger. There was also a sister, which made things worse. She wanted to be my buddy. We played with dolls and I constantly rebelled. These upheavals always ended in the breaking of tiny, China skulls. She was the first person (or female) in my life who attempted to dominate me. She failed of course, as did all the others. I was determined to be all male. It was in me, in my blood that I would always be, and no manuevering on their part could trim me down and fit me for a society in which I could never belong. Their efforts only strengthened me, only hardened me more against future attacks—or attacks of guile —and each attack was one more stone added to the invisible wall I built around me to shut them out.

The second person who tried her hand at conquering me was a five year old blonde. We were playing under the shade of a cape jasmine bush when she decided to take off my clothes. Naturally I balked. She was an Amazon. Once naked, she started comparing. Eyeing our difference was not enough. Her hands had to wander. She was a reckless Jezebel. I am sure, by now, that she is a fallen angel. My mother, working in the flowers, took note of our mischief. She spanked *my* behind.

The third encounter was with one of the next door neighbor boys. He was a sissy to his fingertips, even at two feet high. We were under the house playing with a puppy. In those days people did not wax or polish their floors as they do today. They scrubbed them with soap and water, and there was usually a hole bored in the lowest part of the floor so that the extra water could run through and under the house. My mother always kept a galvanized tub sitting directly beneath the hole to catch the water so that it would not dig ruts under the house and out into the yard. This kid and I decided to strip and play in the tub. My mother was overhead scrubbing the kitchen floor and the hot soapy water was making an inviting waterfall down through the hole and into the tub. It was glorious for awhile, until this kid got affectionate. While I was sitting in the tub with my puppy he stood and started rubbing his body up and down mine. He was older than I and his thighs were directly in my face. He forced my head back until the rim of the tub cut a neat red line beneath my neck. About that time a great tidal wave of hot, dirty water poured through the hole. I all but drowned. A great price to pay for my first hanky-panky with perversion. I was spanked for *that* too. I was only five at the time. It seemed unfair, to be raped and punished at the same time. It was like a double dose of poison. There was also a touch of sorrow in the episode. My puppy drowned.

I was grieved, naturally, and rebellious toward my elders. I fought back. My instinctive sense of

pride, of protection for my own small person, even at that age, reared its belligerent head. I longed desperately to get even with the world. I resented being taken. By nature, I wanted to pursue, not be pursued, and it was toward this I struggled as my goal for survival. Everyone wanted to fondle me for some reason I cannot name. My uncle Ben use to hold me firmly on his lap while he rocked me in an old rocking chair, and as he did so I could feel an enormous swelling where he forced me to sit. Once an aunt of mine caught my penis between her fingers and pinched. I cried. She told my mother, she paddled me because I had "wanted a dip of her snuff." Poor auntie. I bet that was the first one she ever felt. I hope she got her rocks.

I remember the first day I started to school. It is as vivid in my memory as though it happened yesterday. My mother took me that first day. I held her hand as we walked that three blocks to the Lee Elementary school. She was dressed in a cedar-colored dress. It was straight and the waist struck her hips. There were paste buckles on her belt, and she wore a black hat that completely covered her hair and most of her face. I decided to come home before the teacher dismissed the class. It was a city policeman's hand I held on the way back.

"I found your little boy down by the tracks, Mrs. Corley," the policeman said to my mother who met us at the front door. "You shouldn't let him wander off so far. He was going north, in the opposite direction from here."

My mother apologized to the officer, whom she

knew personally. She and my father knew practically everyone in that section of town. Then once inside the house she scolded me. She had a way of looking at you that made you feel like the lowest cur on earth. Actually, she didn't have to utter one word. That look always did it for me. I brooded. I sat on the woodbox behind the kitchen stove. Directly, when she figured I had been punished enough, she brought me a banana and some vanilla wafers.

The first whipping I got in school was for doing the Charleston on top of a desk. The teacher, a Miss Vonadoar, looked like the witch in the Wizard of Oz. She used a yardstick, and my ass was covered with red marks. My father only laughed, but my mother took another view of the matter. She wanted to go to the teacher but Daddy wouldn't let her. He thought the licking would do me good. I was by no means his favorite child. He either ignored me, or took me for granted—which, I know not. Sometimes I believe he did not consider me his or, if he did, it was his own choice to keep me at arms length. He never wasted words on me, and felt that any punishment dealt out to me was my just reward. He never picked me up like he did my sister and kid brother and never hugged, kidded, or fondled me as he did them. They always met him at the door when he came home from work in the evenings, and he would shower them with affection. He never seemed too tired, though he was sprinkled with sawdust and smelled of rich pine wood, to make a fuss over them. I never met him at the door,

but I always watched from a safe distance. The joy of the three gave me joy—but a sad sort of joy.

When I was in the second grade we moved from the capitol city to a small southern village about twenty miles further south. It was on a farm, with hundreds of acres of timber land and fields and pasture. The house sat at the end of a live oak lane, was two stories with tall white columns at the front porch and two enormous halls. It was very much like the houses you read about in romantic southern novels; houses which had existed before the Civil War. I sometimes wonder if that glorious era ever existed at all. But the house was pre-Civil War and it gave you a grand feeling to live there. It was so different from the small, shotgun house in the crowded section of town we moved from. It was so quiet there too. There was none of the constant hum of machines from across the street where daddy worked, nor the rumble of trains, the squeaking of box-cars on the railroad turntable a block away. Here in our new place the nearest house was a quarter of a mile away, and as far as your eyes could see, there was nothing but rolling emerald hills and woods of oak and pine. It was breathtakingly beautiful to me, even at that young age, and born with a leaning toward the artistic, and with a highly developed imagination, I spent a great deal of time drawing landscapes with wax crayons on note-book paper. My second grade teacher was an artist, and one Thanksgiving after she had drawn in colored chalk on the blackboard the feast of the Pilgrims, I decided then and there

that being an artist would be my life's work. The powerful naked Indian on the white horse overlooking the Thanksgiving feast stirred the deepest places within me, and lit up my young, eager soul. I admired her so much that I worked to death every excuse in the book to be near her. But, like most artists, she was stubborn and short-tempered, and showed me plainly that she neither had the desire nor patience to help me in art. Her refusal only made me more determined to become an artist, to be able to paint like her. In time, thank God, I surpassed her. Now I look back on that crude chalk drawing with loathing. I know now that she was mediocre at best.

In my great labor of love I soon forgot the old house in the city, the kids I knew, my little playgrounds, my little secret alcoves. I never saw the sissy red-headed kid again. But on returning home from the Marine Corps after World War II many years later I noticed a huge sign at a used car lot. It read: BENNY FARMER'S USED CARS. I concluded he was still screwing people, this time out of their money instead of their morals.

The hot sun and being constantly out of doors worked wonders for us and we became healthy as pigs. My kid brother caught up with me in size and we became fast friends. We never wore anything in the summer but khaki shorts, always went barefoot, and we were as bronze as Cajuns. We had few toys, but never suffered for the lack. We loved to make things with our hands and we stayed occupied with some task of our own invention. He made

model airplanes and I made submarines and rocket ships. I was hung up on Flash Gordon and he was Lindbergh. One time we made a highway. At that time new highway 49 was being routed south, just east of our property, and the activity lent us inspiration. We looked everywhere for something suitable for concrete and found it, finally, in the chimney grate which opened by an iron door in back of the chimney. The gray ashes from the hearth resembled the color of concrete, and taking a screen wire, we sifted it free of all debris. We poured in water, mixed and laid our miniature turnpike with our hands. The acid ate off our fingernails. We went with our hands bandaged for two weeks.

Once we made an airplane. We used four pine poles, tied and nailed them together pyramid fashion, covered them with croka sacks, and used slabs of corrugated tin for a tail and wings. The wheels were made from an old field disk. We stationed it at the top of a hill in the pasture. My kid brother, resplendent in his leather jacket and aviator cap, got inside. He waved a proud command. With the help of several neighborhood boys, I got it going. The wheels had been greased and they were recklessly free-wheeling. The craft gathered speed. It shot between two pines, shattering the wings and tail. My kid brother's head bobbled up and down and from side to side as the plane pitched and swayed. Watching from the top of the hill, it was a wonderful sight, especially after we had put so much effort into it. In aiming it, we never consid-

ered the cow pond in the valley. It struck the dam head on, actually flew for a moment, then nosed down into the water. It was a drenched hero that crawled from the wreckage. I'm certain Lindbergh never possessed the sense of awe my kid brother experienced during that brief flight. He bragged about it for months, and to this day recalling it still brings a hearty laugh.

There were many things to do in those days, swimming naked in the creek, riding horses, hiking through the woods, picking May balls in early spring, building pine straw huts in the pine thicket, hunting, fishing, and playing dog and squirrel, our favorite game. One boy would be the dog and had to stay on the ground while the other boys (the squirrels) went from one pine tree to the next, bending the tops with their weight and swinging—like Tarzan—from tree to tree. If, by chance, a squirrel boy had to come down and go by ground to another tree, the dog got an opportunity to chase him. This game ended one day when one of the boys fell from a tall pine. He spit blood for several days.

As we grew, we never lacked entertainment or became bored with life. Living in the country never became jaded for us, for we had inventive minds and the will and determination to put ideas into practice. I worked on my art and my kid brother spent a great deal of his time with his miniature modeling. Every Saturday we went into the city for the kiddie matinee. This was an all day affair. First was a floor show presented by the McNair Dancing Academy. We had our favorite stars, selected from

the ones who performed live on the stage and we kept alert to the weekly billings. We had our favorite movie personalities too, and like all kids, anxiously awaited their appearance. After the kiddie show, came an hour-long array of animated cartoons, then a serial, featuring Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Ken Maynard, Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, with Buster Crabbe, or Tarzan. Then, following the cliff hanger, was the main show, as often as not headed by Gene Autry or Roy Rogers. We always took a quarter; fifteen cents for the show, ten cents for a hamburger and a nickel drink. After the movie, we usually hung around the lobby talking to the stars from the dancing academy. They seemed especially glittering to me and my kid brother (we had a natural craving for anything theatrical) and the shiny costumes (usually very brief) were the ultimate in our Saturday's sparkling world. One Saturday my kid brother and I spotted a very strange looking man who fascinated us so much we followed him for several blocks. He was very effeminate, had long platinum blond hair which was roached high up on his head, and he wore make-up on his eyes. He prissed like a girl, and his strangeness awed us. From then on we usually looked for him every Saturday, just for no other reason than to look at him. We had no inkling what he was. We were green as grass. Not till years later did I come to learn that there was a certain word for his kind of men, and that there was a whole army of them, numbering in the thousands. Yet, at the time, he was the only one like that in the world to us, and

for that precise reason, all the more fascinating. I saw him again after the war. He was older, much older. His painted face was a tragic mask. His hair was gray and thin, and he made the same attempt to roach it high on his forehead. Much of his prissiness was gone, and he looked tired, drained—almost dishevelled in his dress and manner. He was standing on Capitol street in front of Walgreen's, his cold, hard eyes darting from left to right, like a startled eagle nervously stalking it's prey. His eyes, for an instant, found mine and his eyebrows went instantly up in dark oblique wings. His eyes glittered like silver in the hot summer light. I gave him the "screw you" finger and passed on.

Walgreen's was the hub of the town then, the meeting place of the young who crowded along its long ice cream bar. My kid brother and I used to frequent the place and pick up essential bits of teen-age talk and interests. We would nudge in among the other kids milling about the magazine racks and develop new relationships with the city folk. They seemed much wittier than we, knew all the important places and had the "know how" in the teen-age world. I will have to admit, we were gullible. We were "too eager" to meet and win friends. We got acquainted with the young man who worked the camera supply counter. His name was James. He was a very good-looking boy, immaculate in his dress, with soft brown eyes and a riot of black curly hair. He was especially attentive to me. He told us he made pictures as a hobby, and asked me if I would like to pose for him; saying

that he was doing a series of ads for health magazines and I fit the part. He mentioned my build, my tan, my smooth features. I was beaming with pride. I would be in national magazines. He took us to his place one Saturday after the movie. He took a number of shots of me in full dress, then several of my kid brother (to make it look natural, I learned later). He gave my brother a dollar and asked him to go to the nearest grocery for ice cream and pop. Then he asked me to disrobe. Too eagerly I disrobed, all except my fig-leaf shorts. He seemed disappointed, but took several shots anyway. Then he asked me to take off my shorts. I hesitated. I could not imagine any national magazine being interested in a teen-age boy in the nude. But I took them off and stood before him in my proud altogether. Then he wanted to do something else. I turned crimson. How I got into my clothes and out of his apartment in such a hurry I'll never know. I met my kid brother returning with the ice cream and drinks. We sat them on the front stoop in the hot sun so the cream would melt. When my brother asked me what had happened I told him that he decided I wouldn't be suitable after all.

"Maybe you'll quit flexing your muscles now," my brother came back at me critically.

After that, whenever we saw James in Walgreen's, he pretended to be waiting on another customer.

We always looked forward to October, for that was State Fair time and my kid brother and I saved our money toward that glorious week of fun

and sight-seeing. We were especially drawn to the huge barrel-shaped arena where the motorcycles went around the wall. We could have stood on that platform for hours, literally, and watched while those daredevils spun around the walls with breath-taking speed. The noise of the backfiring, the grinding engines; was fascinating. The men who sent those flaming torches around that vertical wall were physically above and beyond anything we had ever read or dreamed about. There was one in particular. He was a muscular blond. His heavy thighs rippled through his tight riding pants, and his shiny black boots displayed his massive calves. He wore vari-colored jackets, and his golden hair, falling in ringlets over his brow, made him to me the ideal of a god in marble. Naturally inspired by anything physical, vigorous, or daring, (and at a time in life when desires of all natures are rampant in one's mind and body), I had to know him. To me he was the flesh and blood image of Flash Gordon. He was everything a male could and should be. I had my own impression of what he looked like in the nude, and I was certain his manhood lacked nothing. In fact I was positive he had more than he needed. He was blessed with all the sexual virtues. My kid brother and I bridled and sidled around and about the arena, moving in near him whenever possible until, perhaps out of his own curiosity, he spoke to us. He had come down from Olympus and I was so excited I could hardly speak. His physical presence dominated me, the crowd, the arena, the world. When he walked, he moved as if he owned

the universe, his huge buttocks pronouncing his maleness, his easy going, careless stride making him the envy of all males who strive for the ultimate in physical prowess. I thought him like a panther walking on velvet.

His name was Flash Williams and we gained enough of his interest for him to invite us into his trailer between acts. He fixed coffee and showed me every one of his costumes. Even off, they clearly defined his superb build. The imprint of every muscle showed in the bulges of the cloth. When he looked directly at me he had the eyes of a lion. While I was admiring his brightly colored jackets, some of them of silk, others of tinted leather, he side-stepped into the tiny bath and, un-buttoning his pants, exposed himself and urinated. My lower jaw dropped. It was at least a foot long and had a head as big as a cat. His dexterous hand held it lovingly and, slipping it back into his pants he gave me a knowing wink. To this day I have held him in my mind with something bordering on awe. That image of him engraved itself on my brain, telegraphing something vital, electric, throughout my system, an image I cannot erase or forget. In that one natural and unselfconscious gesture he formed the blue-print by which I would come to judge all men in the future. And though I have met many admirable men since, in and out of the Marines, and have observed numerous men with all their glory exposed, none have compared to this dare-devil, reckless giant. That image has dominated my art and my writing. Every male I paint

takes its proportions from the image he planted in my mind. I cannot escape it. Where he is today I have often and sadly, wondered. Wherever he is I hope he is happy and I will not hope that his mate is happy (if he has a mate) for if she is not, then she—like most women—is a complete fool!

I tried my hand at being a dare-devil, but in a somewhat different way. I used a train instead of a motorcycle. Bordering my father's property was a railroad cut. Here the trains always slowed for the up-grade. One summer twilight my kid brother and I were busy hunting for sharks teeth and sea shells that littered the embankment (this was at one time the ocean gulf) when an evening freight came through. We planned to catch it, but only to hop a ride until it had cleared the grade, then jump off. Hopping it was easy. All we had to do was run along side a moving box car at that point where the irons went up one end—we had seen this many times in the movies—then leap into the air and catch hold of the metal rungs. It was like eating ice cream. It was a joyous ride. It was so joyous in fact that neither of us noticed the engine far ahead gathering speed. My kid brother, who was always more alert than I, finally sensed the rapid acceleration. He leaped, tumbled several times in the loose shells, then got to his feet. He began to run, calling after me. But by that time I had realized my own plight and was frozen to the iron rung. The ground beneath me sailed by at breath-taking speed. My brother faded out of sight as the train sped around a curve. All I could do was hang on for dear life

for I knew by now it was too late to jump. In all my life I had never seen a train move so fast. Darkness came on. The wind rushing past me was like ice, and far ahead, like some terrible demon, the fire and black smoke leaped from the engine stack. The wild air tried to tear me from the car, and my shirt tail flapped behind me like sails in a sea storm. I had the odd sensation the train was taking me into the very jaws of hell, that it would never stop, but would go on and on forever, or finally plunge over the edge of the world and kill us all. After what seemed to me an eternity, it came to a halt in the county seat. I dropped off just before reaching the town, relishing the warm air which engulfed me. I was numb, both from fright and from the chill. Added to my misery, I was lost. My father and my kid brother met me in the model-T Ford. I guess my father knew the train would stop in this little southern town. He whipped my behind then and there. My brother only grinned at me in such a way that it made me want to slap him. He had been born with many advantages. First, and foremost; he was mean. He was like a cat when you hold it by its feet and drop it. He always came out right side up. His meanness won for him the things he wanted. Two, he never seemed to get caught. He also refused to work. This left my mother and father forever baffled. They were unable, mentally or physically to cope with him. He did not use guile nor excuses like other kids. He just flatly refused to work.

We all had certain chores to do around the farm,

with certain and explicit times in which to do them, and when a chore had gone undone my parents instantly knew who to blame. Since my kid brother refused to do his, for some reason I always did them for him. One day he was to cut the persimmon sprouts in the south field and I was to do the breaking of the land with a turning plow. He refused to cut them so I was unable to do the plowing until the sprouts were cleared from the field. I knew my father would expect to see the field broken by the time he returned from work in the evening. I tried to persuade my kid brother to cut them. It was no use talking to my mother about the matter. She had long since abandoned any hope of making him work. I took him, tied him, and strung him up from a limb of a china-berry tree. I allowed just his feet to touch, and directly over an ant bed. I was certain torture would do the trick. I was sure he would howl for mercy, would beg me to untie him, and would, in turn, do his chore. He never even whimpered. The ants crawled all over him. That evening my father bathed my kid brother's body with ointment. Then, going out into the field and cutting the largest persimmon sprout he could find, he put welts on my behind. The next day I did both chores. I cut the sprouts, then broke the field. My kid brother, no longer agonized by ants, spent the day painting a model airplane, with my paint and brush. He never considered asking my permission. He knew my generosity.

He was always breaking things. One day he broke my mother's favorite dinner plate. She spanked

him unmercifully. The next day he repeated the same thing by shattering a piece of her eggshell china. That evening she turned him over to my father. I was rapturous with joy. My father led him down the lane behind the smokehouse. I had to see this from the beginning to the end. I crept into the smokehouse and peered through a crack in the rear. Directly behind the smokehouse lay our garden. My father led my kid brother down one of the rows—then stopped where the onions began. My brother watched his every move, and his face was white, and filled with alarm. My father took out his pocket knife, reached down and whacked off an onion. After he had cleaned it he handed it to my kid brother and asked him to eat it. My kid brother reluctantly took the onion and bit into it. Tears flooded his eyes. Satisfied, my father led him back around the smokehouse. My mother met them in the lane. She saw my kid brother's eyes dripping with tears. She was instantly up in arms.

"Did you have to kill him, Willie?" she stormed, shaking a finger at my father. He didn't answer her. My kid brother had escaped one more time. I was furious. I wanted desperately to do something wicked. I climbed a sycamore behind the barn and sat until dark smoking rabbit tobacco.

Though I rarely, if ever, played with my sister, I did keep the doll I had gotten from one of my cousins when I was around six years old. My brothers always kidded me that I let it sleep in my shaving kit. Though that was not the truth, it came close to it. I suppose I hung onto the doll for

sentimental reasons. I know no other. But it was a beautiful china doll, one of those rare dolls dressed up in a little boy's velvet suit, with ruffles around the neck and sleeves, and with huge glass eyes and real lashes. I called it Kayro, from the comic strip kid. My brother and I used to toss it back and forth, like grown people do with live children, and I think he was fond of Kayro too.

The summer I was in the ninth grade we were to go on a boy scout trip and I had taken Kayro out of the canvas haversack where I kept him stored, for I needed the haversack for the trip. While I was packing my father came into the room. He saw the doll and turned a livid green. He began to foam at the mouth.

"Aren't you ever going to be a man?" he gasped, lunging at the doll as if I had committed some kind of unforgivable crime. I drew back in fury.

"I can whip your ass any day in the week!" I spat back rudely. I had always harbored the assumption that he had never understood me, and primarily because he had never tried.

In another instant I had regretted my error in speech. Taking Kayro (I always referred to it as Kayro, as a live person and never as a doll) he broke its skull against the mantle. Lamenting my nostalgic rememberance of it, I stooped and retrieved the pieces. The next day my kid brother consented to help me give Kayro a decent burial. I had observed Catholic priests in the movies, particularly those in the Zorro movies, and I wanted to give Kayro a Catholic funeral. I borrowed my sis-

ter's nightgown for a robe and strung china berries on a thread for my rosary. It was a solemn affair. With Kayro in a white shoe box, we went down into the pasture where a long cedar grew, one which resembled the symbolic Christmas Tree, and there we buried him beneath the soft brown needles. I read from the Bible and my kid brother, who had a passable singing voice, sang "Love Lifted Me." There were tears in both our eyes (for we had always been, and still are, overly dramatic) as we came slowly back to the house. I went up on the front porch where my father sat reading the evening paper. He took one look at me in my sister's nightgown and his pipe fell out of his mouth.

"My God! You're even wearing dresses now!" he fumed. He threw the paper into the azalea bushes.

* * *

Living on a farm, with acres and acres of playground, we were seldom in-doors, and the fresh country air, the sun, worked wonders for us. We had plenty to eat, even though we lived in the aftermath of an international depression, for we raised our own food; vegetables, corn, potatoes, beans, and melons from our garden, fruit from our orchards, eggs, chicken, hog, and cow for meat. Our clothes were simple, so we suffered none for lack of fashionable attire, and our wants were few. We had everything growing boys needed, and our environment was adequate. The people we associated with were normal, healthy, country people. Sex did not

interest us, for there was nothing about it we did not know—or thought we knew.

There was an old Model-T Ford sitting in a neighbor's pasture. The wheels and tires were gone, and it rested on the axles, but everything else was intact. My kid brother, his buddy—a boy named Paul who was about his age, and I used to pretend to drive it. We would take turns. They would sit in back on the old black oilcloth seats while I sat in front manipulating pedals, and turning the huge steering wheel at imaginary curves in the road. I do not think I could have had more fun if I was actually in a car traveling to far off places, for, with my vivid imagination, I would sit in the driver's seat and call out to them things and places we passed: the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, Rome, Paris, Peking, the Taj Mahal, Bombay, the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth. And I saw these places in my mind as vividly as if I was really there. I think they saw them too as I explained it all to them and gave each minute detail on our numerous travelogues. Though we never moved an inch, though the trees in the pasture never swept past us like signposts in the far distance, we (in our minds) were in those exotic places, exalted, in luxury. It was a simple joy we three shared which did not cost a cent, and taxed only our storehouse of imagination.

That summer, after my ninth year in school, our first cousin came from the Navy to visit us. We all worshiped him. It was the happiest summer of my life. He had always spent at least two weeks out of every summer with us and then, having joined the

Navy, he was to remain his entire thirty-day furlough with us. My aunt and uncle had separated when he was very small and he had, through the course of years, adopted us. He was dark of skin, extremely well built, had a riot of jet black curls which tumbled over his smooth forehead, with snapping black eyes and a lazy southern drawl. With his white uniform, his sailor cap, his seabag thrown recklessly over one shoulder, he was indeed a god to us. With flashing white teeth and a ready smile he told us about far away places, about ships and submarines and planes which my kid brother and I loved, and he was the ultimate in worldliness to us, the epitome of the man of the world. Being country reared, and having gone no further than to the capitol city for shows and occasional shopping jaunts, he was our connection with the universe. What he did not know wasn't worth knowing. His name was Edward, and we all affectionately called him "Ed'ard." We spoiled him, from my father on down. Everyone of us tried to draw him out singularly, to occupy his time with a bit of foolish information we attempted to siphon from his great, endless well of knowledge. We jealously, maliciously, bid for his hand. We fought to sit next to him at the table, jockeyed for seats near him on the divan in the living room, and applied all our inexperienced wits to gain and keep his attention.

Edward was a laughing boy, good natured, joking and kidding us a lot. He loved my mother and father, I am sure, more than he did his own. He considered our house his home and he did chores

whenever he was there on visits, just as the rest of us. He was a natural charmer, and that charm was such an instinctive part of his nature (not guile or pretended warmth) that he could afford to be loving to all. It is the badge of the young, and he wore it without self-consciousness.

Since my bedroom was the neatest room in the house—I kept it immaculate—my mother put Edward in with me. Had she put in Alexander the Great, or David, or Flash Williams, I could not have been more elated. I was constantly in awe of his person, his seeming magnificence, and I could not talk to him without my voice trembling. He was a warrior in my young, innocent eyes, a victorious hero fresh from the awesome noise of battle to rest in the peace of my little neat room, a place where he could lie and lick his wounds.

Let the whole family have him by day, I did not mind, I thought recklessly, for I would have him at night. I would always climb in the bed first. It was next to the double windows, and I would lie under the shroud of darkness, with only the moonlight streaming in to light us, while I watched him undress. He would strip completely, the pale luminous glow picking out faintly his chest, his huge forearms, his thick hairy thighs. Then he would lie down beside me. He would light a cigarette and lie there silently smoking it. Neither would speak. But I would watch him with my heart in my throat, daring to make out his thoughts, to walk into his private world, even for a moment—a breath—a mere second. The red glow of his cigarette would

light up his body, all the way down to the dark patch of pubic hair which hid—half hid—his mystery, the mystery that made him so alive, vital, exciting!

He would finally snuff out the butt and, turning on one side, place his arms around me and draw my body close. His thigh would go over mine and, in this manner, he slept. I dared not move throughout the night, fearing to wake him and break the spell. That this warm warrior's body was so near mine, that his easy, satisfied breathing poured over mine, filled my innocent heart with something bordering on ecstacy. In my innocence, in my somewhat lonely orphanage, I felt strongly that there was something about my own person, my own self which brought about his comfort, his dreamy attitude of happiness. This maddening but simple thought sustained me, gave me steadfast hope that I was being needed—needed and truly wanted by someone for the first time in my life. It was the same every night. In fact it was a ritual. He proceeded in exactly the same way, and he never altered the chronological order of his actions from the moment he entered my room until the cigarette was out and he drew me to him. That this fine, noble person, that this hard dark soldier needed me, and rested in the balm of my nearness, intoxicated me as much as if I had nightly taken a swig of liquor. Had he been less handsome, had he been less reckless, had he been less perfect of bodily proportion, had he been anything other than a soldier home from battle, I might have felt no urges of swift motion and

passion within me, but he was—indeed—all these things, and more, much more, especially to me in my countryfied ignorance, and for that precise reason he was all the more fascinating. I never pondered the distraction that I was too old a boy to be cousin-cuddled. Not till years later did I ever pursue the fantastic idea that he was anything but a normal, healthy American male, and that was only after I had gone to war and seen it as the dirt it is, with no glory, that I had the thought.

Later Edward was drowned in the Atlantic Ocean, killed when the Germans torpedoed the U.S.S. Wasp, an aircraft carrier on which he was a member of the crew. 'Til this day, after a World War, four major campaigns to my credit, and much sorrow, he is still that wondrous god in marble, the essence of purity, strength, and sublime beauty.

That glorious summer when he departed at the end of his furlough I grew up a little, hardened a little. Something of that pure innocence to which I had always clung desperately, faded somehow; faded sadly in a welter of tears and, going to that little rock knoll in the woods (where he and I used to sit so often) I flung myself upon the hard stones and cried like a child.

I brooded. I grew silent. I dreaded going to bed at night. In the darkness I would wake, my arm outstretched, feeling desperately for the body that never again would touch me, nor hold me, nor breathe, nor live again. His sudden absence cut an enormous hole in my simple life and nothing since, not quite anyway, has even in part come to mend

it. There is still a dark hollow, an empty place within me whenever his name is recalled by some member of the family, when my thoughts will stray over the broken lanes of my childhood and I uncover the deep wounds and let them hurt again.

I went back to school that fall after his visit, still brooding, still ill at ease, short-tempered, and with no one to cut my cord of pain, with no one to cut me away from the darkness which filled my world with mysterious illusions.

The school we attended, both elementary and high, was three miles from home and we reached it by bus. The "coach" was made of wood, with two benches on each side and one down the middle. There were canvas flaps on the sides which could be rolled up and tied in hot dry weather and let down during the wet and the cold. The back lay open to the elements and was occupied usually by two older boys who stationed themselves on the back step in a standing position, in a way, very much like the paddy wagons seen in movies with the two cops hanging on for dear life in the rear. The road was a farm-to-market route, once graveled, but in my time ground to dust as fine as talcum powder, and as red as Georgia clay. The dust covered our shirts, our jeans, our riding boots, and the gingham dresses of the girls. When it rained, the road became a river of mud, the bus sometimes sinking to the axles. But whatever hazards the driver faced to get us to and from, it never penetrated to the passengers. A motley crew, but a joyous one. The girls sang, "I Am Bound For A Promised Land,"

and the boys kept up a chain of mischief, employing every means of heckling that could be invented by a crew of mixed minds. From those rides I will remember the smell of fresh-cut narcissus, the peppery smell of roses which the girls carried to their teachers, mingled with the sharp smell of mown hay, shocked corn, mud, shoe polish, powder, and wet canvas. I will remember, too, a little boy who use to get on the bus near the end of the line. He was so small I wondered why he should be going to school and he carried a lunch box larger than he was. He was like one of those elves, sitting on a toad stool you see in children's story books and his face had a radiant inner glow, as if he was lit—like a lantern—from within. The first day the bus was so crowded he had to sit on my lap, and from then on his tiny, darting bright eyes sought me out the moment he climbed up the steps of the bus, so I always let him sit on my knees. He was so small, so like myself when I was his age, so helpless in this mad, shifting, noisy world I felt sorry for him and found myself looking for him each evening at school when the bus was loading for the return trip home. In my first loneliness, in my first hostility toward a world which had shorn me of Edward, I went further than that. I sought him out at school from time to time each day to make sure he was all right, took him to the water fountains, held him up so that he could drink, took him to the toilets, went to the classroom at lunch hour and let him sit on the woodpile opposite the basketball court and eat his lunch with me. I was his guiding light in this

unfamiliar, uncertain world and he awarded me with a rich outpouring of affection. Then I did not know that he in time (after world war II) would become my dearest friend, nor did I know my relationship with him would stamp a final impression on his life. I, like Edward, was his god, and he would acknowledge that in years to come.

Once in a school play he was Tom Thumb in a miniature wedding, with full dress—white tie, tails, and all—and he fit the part to perfection. To this day he is still small, impish in his manner, extremely handsome in a pixieish sort of way, and solidly built. To me, he still looks like a small child turned loose in a grown-up world. You find yourself trying to help him and he would be the last person I know to ask for pity. He is self-sustaining. His independence breaks your heart.

He lives on a dairy farm and he breaks horses for a living, the most unlikely of all trades for one with his small stature. Yet, in his tight levi's, buff boots, and poke hat, he is a whirlwind. He has exhausted many a stallion which to me had the strength to kick him to bits. That he is devoted to his last drop of blood is flattery beyond my limited comprehension. But had he not been, I suppose I would have long since lost what little belief I had left in human nature. Now it is he who lifts a hand to me, who shields me from the crassness, sham and degradation of the rest of the world.

I have been told that life travels in an arc. With him it has turned full circle. He has become, and still is, to me the personification of all that remains

of kindness, nobility, and loyalty, not to mention truth. He is the lily in the sewer, a rose in a garden of weeds. Today when I see him, I immediately recall the mental picture of him going down that aisle between the seats, so long ago, immaculate in white and black, his tiny blond head a crown of shining gold, his miniature wife waiting for him at the flower-laden alter on a country stage.

When I was in the eleventh grade my English teacher put on an operetta as a means to raise additional funds for a school cafeteria. It was called "The Blue Belt" and demanded an enormous cast. Practically every student from the ninth up had a part in it, if only a walk on part, and there was much planning and to-do months in advance. It was a costume piece, set in the era of the knights and ladies fair, and resembling, in plot, the tale of The Sleeping Beauty. Everyone jockeyed for "meaty" parts and the school was in an uproar as to who would be selected for the prince and princess. No one was surprised, however, when the wealthiest boy and girl in high school were chosen. This was standard procedure and, to most of the community, ancient history. It was always the wealthier kids who ended up leading the list in who's-who, Mr. and Miss so-and-so high, the handsomest, the most beautiful, the most likely to succeed, etc. After a series of tests I was selected to play the part of a prophet. (Or the Merlin, so to speak, of King Arthur) I labored over my costume for weeks in advance. Since I had not gotten the part I wanted, the one of the King who would wear

sumptuous robes and would sit high up on a golden throne, I was determined to outdo them all with my costume. My mother gave me an old bed spread, deep purple, which I cut up and made into a robe. I stitched balls of orange wool around the hem, which were about the size of golf balls, painted the moon and stars the length and breadth of it with silver paint, and borrowed my mother's numerous strands of beads to wear about my neck. I imprisoned my wrists in gypsy bracelets, made a pair of Arabian slippers out of red felt—like the ones Aladdin always wore—and a tall, pointed turban dripping with gems and cascading silks. I was to be magnificient, and I counted the days and nights, the hours and seconds until that wonderous opening night. No star in Hollywood could have possibly felt such elation of spirit. The English teacher put me in charge of decorations, and I siphoned up all my previous training as production manager of our barn theatre to make the play a success. I lent exaggerated attention to the burial mound where the princess was to lie until the prince came and cut the casket away with his golden sword. This was the climaxing scene and the turning point of the story. It was to catch and hold the audiences eye, and I made sure it did. I made the casket from chicken wire, strung it with green carpeting I borrowed from a funeral parlor, and lined the interior with pink paper roses. Behind the princess' burial couch (which I brimmed over with silken pillows) I placed two bulbs of ice blue, to lend a death pallor to the princess' complexion.

That long-awaited night finally arrived and there was a stampede of students back stage, adjusting their costumes, reading their parts again for the millionth time, nervously twitching, some of them pale, drawn, frightened stiff, some of them peering through the crack in the curtain to take note of the assembly. Every seat was taken. It was a smashing success, a sell-out, and the anticipation of that success seemed to galvanize everyone into frivolous action, or to hypnotize them completely. I remained in the dressing room, as the teacher had instructed me, to help with the costumes and the make-up. I was in ecstasy. The paint and the powder, the eye-brow pencils, the pancake make-up, the glitter of tinsel, the shimmer of satins, the swish of color, scarlet and wine, of furs, filled me with a never-before happiness that made my senses reel. All the green years of my artistic talents, all the love of the theatre, of stars, of acting, of pretending, led up to this one night, this one glittering world of paradise. It was suddenly my world, the world I was born and made for, and I lived it to the summit of my being. It is as clear today as the day it happened—twenty-eight years ago.

All too soon came my cue. The background music slowed to an ominous dirge. I knew the second that I should walk onto the stage, by the sound of the music alone, for I had rehearsed it a million times in mind, as I lay tossing and turning at night, as I labored at my after-school chores, as I slept, even while I dreamed. This was to be the establishment of the climax to the play, when the dead

princess still lay in her tomb and I, the prophet, inform the King that the princess still lives, that she will be rescued from her grave. It is to be hushed, solemn. The sound of the music tells the audience this.

With a huge volume of magic lore, I am to come out onto the stage, stand mutely for a tense moment before the King, then say: "Now before your eyes Mustalore, you see—"

I make my entrance. I take one petrified glance at the audience, see the hundreds of pairs of eyes staring at me out of the darkness. Reaching the throne I turn center stage and face the gargantuan auditorium filled to the exits with people, people I had known all my life but not hostile strangers. I am elated, and that elation plays a dirty trick on me. I fumble with my mother's beads which are wound around my neck and fall in glittering loops to my waist. I accidentally drop the magic book. With nothing else to do, I stoop and pick it up, but as I do so my beads entangle in one of the orange woolen balls around the hem of my robe. Rising, I lift the robe with it and, unknowingly, expose my naked legs to the crotch.

There are giggles, childish laughter.

I begin my speech: "Now before your eyes Mustalore you see—"

A sudden roar booms up from the audience, and that roar is laughter piled on laughs until the sound is like the roaring of a sea. I did not know what had brought on the unexpected jubilation but suspected in my vanity that it was from the results of my

talented acting. I was being discovered. Hollywood would find me, I was sure. Not till I had completed my speech and drifted into the wings, rapt, did I discover the reason for the "ovation." One hurried glimpse at my naked legs, my fig leaf shorts and I read the answer, the mortifying answer. The operetta was ruined. At the precise moment when solemnity was to lead to a beautiful climax, I had wrecked the mood of the audience. The cast became recklessly upset. When the prince drew his sword to cut away the grave, he nervously overshot his mark, stabbing the princess' thigh. Flinging up her arms, she knocked both badly damaged portions of the grave in opposite directions. And the two blue tinted blubs, flung out from their concealed places, rolled along the stage, throwing fantastic shadows of the players along the waving canvas backdrop.

Pandemonium broke loose in the audience. Heckles and wild laughter followed the streams of people as they jammed the stairs going down into the street. I was saved only in that no one asked for a refund on the admission price. The serious operetta had been turned into an unexpected comedy.

The school had its new cafeteria, and I had my unforgivable shame. Like a wild being out of chaos I flung myself into my art work, determined to succeed one way or the other. Alex Raymond, the creator and artist of Flash Gordon, reached out across the miles and drew me into his spell. I fell in love with the characters, the plot, the beautiful

people, most of all the artist's technique. I must draw like he could. Nothing, no one could stop me. I withdrew into a shell. The world swept by me. I lived, I existed only for art, for my own self-imposed goal, to master the drive that tore against my heart.

I had lost Edward to God, The loss had hardened me. I was no longer like potters clay, to be affected by each slight imprint. That clay had hardened, solidified, and I turned a somewhat embittered face to the world. With those unhealed, and unhealing, wounds, I realized painfully that I was growing up. And I did not want to grow up, to shoulder the responsibility of the grown-up world. I still wanted to play like a child, to bask in that innocent sun I knew and loved so well. The person I had loved was nothing near to greatness, though great to me, and the loss was deep and painful. Edward—Edward had been to me that far off ideal, that idol of the hero worshiper which is somewhere in every little boy, and always in the adolescent youth. Though I know now that he was a homosexual, a modern Alexander the Great, that hidden knowledge did not make a single dent in my blessed adoration and continuous admiration for him. He remains in my heart the epitome of what every male should be, despite his handicap, if homosexuality can be termed a handicap. I loved and lost during a time when the sap in my body was still young and warm; quick to blossom and early to die.

My kid brother and I drifted. He with his flying lessons at Johnny Cleveland's flying school, and me

with my art. I created a comic strip. After pondering a hundred different names I finally settled on Tiga Polo. He still exists in my imagination today as vividly as the day when Shelly created her Frankenstein and his monster. Though mine was a beautiful monster, endowed with all the manly graces, quick as lightning, my inspiration did come from Mrs. Shelley and her imaginative creation.

During my twelfth year at school I met Maurice. It was after that Christmas, and he had moved from Gonzales, Louisiana. He was undecided on whether to be a boy or a girl. To my notion he should have been a girl, for he had all the mannerisms. He, too, was an artist, so he said, though I never saw any of his paintings, he could ramble on for hours on end telling about his costume designing for the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. I clung to his friendship, I suppose, because I needed someone in the arts who could guide me in that field, who could help me in any way to further my goal. Actually, he was little help. I found his pencil sketches of his "fabulous" costumes trite. There were better ones in Tillie the Toiler, and his knowledge of anatomy (bodies being my favorite painting subject) was sketchy to say the least. But there was a frankness in his liking for me, and God knows, I had experienced little enough of that with my friendships with the other boys at school. It was a comforting thing to be liked, even if that person was nothing more than an untalented pansy.

There was a small country store not far from home which we used at times to buy essential

things for the kitchen, pop drinks, chewing gum, and ice-cream. I was usually the one selected to go purchase these things, since everyone else always seemed "too busy" at the time. Every time I went there, the same old man with a pot gut sat on a stool at a make-shift counter. He always followed me with his eyes—eyes that were silvery blue, like water, and piercing. After I had purchased whatever it was my mother sent me after he would inevitably draw me out in conversation. He always made a point to brag on my appearance, declaring how neatly I was dressed, and he especially complimented me on my long dark wavy hair, though his hot eyes, seemingly, never veered that high up. He called me "taffy candy," which I loathed and began inviting me to his home, laughingly of course. In a friendly way I always refused. Once I jokingly said yes and he asked very low, so that the others in the store could not hear, if I was going to bring the vaseline or did I want him to get it. Stupid me, I did not know quite what he meant, though I suspected something foul. I told Maurice what he had said. After that he and Maurice became fast friends. I never knew, nor cared to know, who furnished the vaseline.

There was an old book store in the capitol city at which I hung out frequently. It was a second hand book store, a long dark hall-type affair with hundreds and hundreds of books and magazines stacked to the high ceilings. I liked to spend my Saturdays there and usually occupied myself between those moldy aisles the entire day. There was

a sandwich and pop drink counter up front, so I could eat while I looked and read. I was in the midst of collecting everything I could locate on Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon and, no matter how long I searched through those tattered remains of publications, I was justly rewarded when one of the Flash Gordon editions came within my grasp. My search for these out-dated editions had a long and mighty arm, for I had everyone I knew looking for them, and my research program built up during my high school years. Practically everyone called me by the nickname Flash, even a new friend I met in the book store who seemed to make it a point to be there early every Saturday morning. His name was Tuffy, and he would always greet me with a vigorous, "Hello there, Flash!" He was short and stocky, about sixteen, and extremely rugged in physical appearance, the reason, no doubt, for his name. When I first met him, he was a little on the disheveled side. His clothes were untidy. His shoes were never shined and his hair rarely, if ever, combed. But as our friendship progressed, I noticed he showed up in better looking clothes. He was always clean shaven, usually wore a sport coat and tie, and his shoes fairly glistened. On occasion he would invite me to a place around the corner on Mill street called the Cotton Picker's bar. It was a grimy place, to say the least, and was operated by a woman with tattoos over her entire leathery face. There I sampled my first beer, which I did not like, and rubbed elbows with the weirdest mob I have ever seen. They were usually tramps, derelicts of all

types, and here and there among them sat bosomy women, too heavily made-up and none too steady on their feet. The place and its clientele represented everything I despised in the world—dirt, human filth, sin—and I always felt ill at ease. But Tuffy always insisted and I always gave in. The more I saw him the more his life unraveled, and I learned he got his clothes and easy spending money from a "friend." He asked if I wanted to be introduced to him to which I answered no, and he explained that: "I don't mind you seeing him, Flash, cause you're nice and all, not like the other sports I know in this town. They'd try and take him away from me."

I was puzzled, not quite up on what he had meant, for I was, with truth, ignorant of the modes of city life. I had reason to be ignorant. I had no desire to learn. The life of the streets had never sent out its siren call to me and, until it did, I considered the loss my gain.

One late Saturday afternoon Tuffy dismissed himself earlier than usual, stating his friend had to leave town for awhile and he wanted to get his allowance before he left. I thought nothing of the situation, and continued my never-ending search through the mountain of dusty magazines. I went to the front of the book store later to get a pop drink and I noticed Tuffy going into the Edwards hotel across the street. With him was an old man, stooped, white of hair, paunchy around the waist and ill-clad. One foot was twisted, much shorter than the other, supported by a wooden extension

and a shiny metal brace, and he manipulated on two canes with arm supports. Tuffy's friend! I fell back aghast! I wanted to vomit. My hair felt like it was going to stand on end, I was so utterly shocked. I was shamefully disappointed in Tuffy, whom I had grown to like immensely. He was nothing but a "male prostitute."

During that early spring of my graduation year a circus came to town. I had always loved a circus, due mainly to its pageantry, its glitter, its wildly fascinating people—the hurry, the bustle, the blaring lights, the bombastic music, the animals, the smell of hay and popcorn, and the beautiful performers. They all had such nicely shaped bodies, especially those graceful men and women on the high wires, and I would not have missed it for anything in the world—I still never miss them—I drove for miles to be in on a show. The circus was my world, for it represented in its entirety everything I love. It is like a painting by Van Gogh—vivid, alive, and splashed with every hue in the spectrum.

The lion trainer caught and held my eye. Like Flash Williams of the motocycle craze, he was a blond giant, built like Hercules, and wore black shiny boots, sequin studded (skin tight) pants, and a scarlet silken blouse. The slash of his fiery whip, the gleaming pistol at his thigh, the tawny cats going through their paces up-rooted primeval passion within me, summoned the call of the wild, the fantastic physical power of man over beast. I sat there agog. Here was mystery and intrigue, the

physical dexterity of the male in so vainglorious a tune with the tenor of life it bordered on the exotic and here walked another god into the rural simplicity of my young, eager life.

He brought to bay a huge black panther and willed him (with his pale blue eyes, I'm sure) to lie upon a scarlet felt-covered platform with its ebony back to the audience. Then he announced to the audience his intention to give fifty dollars to anyone who would enter the cage with him and stroke the panther's neck and back. No sooner had he spoken, no sooner had his smooth, beckoning voice stilled within the amplifier than I, like a sleepwalker, rose from my chair and went down through the audience to the edge of the cage. Daniel had risked death for his soul. I was to risk death for beauty. The blond giant shook my hand, asked my name, which he broadcast over the loud speaker, then led me through the narrow gate-type door of the cage. I trembled like a thief. I had never feared the physical. For I was of the physical, mainly. It is the spirit that fears. It is the unknown that terrifies. And here the known faced me squarely, and in the starkest of reality. The blond trainer remained at my side, and to the rear of me as I slowly advanced to the black growling menace on the red velvet. His one gloved hand was steady on my buttocks, his other free one ready on the pistol at his magnificent thigh. Under the influence of his reassuring guidance I would have willingly gone with him into the flaming jaws of hell.

Here I was in the throes of the ancient. The

primeval beasts of the wild glorified by the full blossomed glory of man. I was as exalted as a king. The wild drumming sounds from the audience helped to prod me on and nearing the side of the enormous panther, I sat down on the platform (as the trainer instructed and with my right hand atremble, stroked the back of the animal's turned head, his back, down to his haunches.

Wild cheers thundered from the audience. The huge god before me shook my hand, then led me quickly from the ring. A tall man in a scissor tailed suit standing outside the gate handed me fifty dollars. The trainer tapped me on the shoulder. He grinned, flashing white teeth. His admiration for me shone in his darkly lashed eyes. That was enough for me. They could have kept the fifty dollars. But life is allegoric. We never win, for it is man's ultimate destiny to lose. He will become extinct because of this malformation. I took the fifty dollars and went out and bought myself a pair of shiny riding boots, tight pink-khaki riding pants, and a silken shirt. There was one catch. There was no place to go to wear it. But I have kept the costume intact, and all I have to do in order to bring back those flashing white teeth, that wild ferocious creature on scarlet velvet, is to take my costume from its storage, and it all comes trooping back.

* * *

It was during that immortal year of 1939, that the movie "Gone With The Wind" was filmed. My

mother and father went to Atlanta for the premiere. She returned elated. She could talk of nothing else for days. She wanted me to see it. She implored me, she especially sought me out. It would say, she explained tearfully, all the things she had always wanted, had longed to tell me about the south. Like Jean Valjean's "Les Miserables" during the Civil War for Confederate troops, "Gone With The Wind" was her bible. She longed that I prostrate myself upon its altar.

When the movie came to the capitol city I went to see it. I went alone. The orchestra was filled, so I sat in the balcony. I must admit, I was skeptical. My mother and I had not always seen eye to eye on world nor rural affairs.

From the moment the curtain parted and the title swept across the screen I was in another world, another time, another dimension. Everything that I had ever known, every emotion that I had ever experienced, everything that had gone before, was commonplace in my heart and of no moment. My life heretofore had been no more than the life of a hottentot, and every torment, and every passion no more than a schoolboy fancy. Toward the end, during the death scenes, I became drugged, overwrought, the tears flowing down my face in wild silver streams. When it was over I returned solemnly to the modern world overwrought, desolate, with the odd feeling of being cheated out of life. I had lived these young years, every moment, every instant; I had imagined, but not like this, not with the accumulated loves and passion, with the boun-

tiful energies these people exerted, that these wonderful people steeped themselves in for the love of their homes, for the lives of their friends.

I got off the bus at the edge of my father's property. I wanted to walk. I wanted to be alone. I wanted to think. I cut through the fields, subconsciously coming through the rye of my youth, and there, where a deep hollow let in the view and I could see my father's house crowning the next hill, I lay down in the soft grass and wept like a child. Like Scarlett, I scooped up a handful of moist earth and pressed it to my sobbing lips. Never had I loved home more, nor this land more, nor life more.

My life suddenly changed.

I became destitute. I wanted to get away from it all. The house, the grounds, the fields, all the places I had grown up in and loved were suddenly too much for me to bear. There were constant rumors of war so I joined the Marines. Though I was small in stature, I was robust and physically sound and I passed with flying colors.

That last day, I left my father at the kitchen door crying. I could not stand to look his way. I turned away. Through the blur of my own tears, I saw with a kind of tormented bitter rebellion, the cedar tree down in the pasture where my kid brother and I had buried Kayro.

My mother and my kid brother drove me to the city. They walked with me to the edge of the block where the recruiting station was located. My mother was dressed in desolate black. She had on a black wide-brimmed hat that partially hid her

graying hair, and she suddenly looked stooped, old. I said good-bye hastily, went down the block a piece, then turned and gazed back. My mother was on her way back to the car. Once she thought I was gone she straightened her shoulders in a struggle for dignity and the gesture went to my heart. My kid brother ran across the street to me and we embraced. We clung to one another there before the hurrying crowd, as we had clung to one another in those wonderous times of our early youth that was over now.

We would play no more games. We would build no more model planes, build no more ships, no more submarines or rocketships. We would keep no more secrets. Life was spoiled for us now. The breach was widening, the gulf that would take us away from one another, that would rob us of our childhood, our simple, innocent happiness together.

So I left them there in the middle of Capitol street, and I also left my innocence on that long dark road of my childhood, left it to follow after me like a hobbling ancient.

EAGLES, ANCHORS AND THE WORLD

My D.I. in boot camp was called Spitty by the platoon, a name which fit the man. He was all spit, shine—and guts. He wasn't afraid of the devil himself.

He reminded me of my kid brother—perhaps this was because I was lonely to see him, I do not know. He was as neat as an old maid's breast pin. His khaki uniform fit like a lady's glove. No grime, not one grain of dust touched him. His fastidiousness made it doubly hard on the raw recruits, for no one's uniform fit, and the adjustment from civilian to military life was difficult.

Spitty tolerated no foolishness. He was grim. He never smiled and he never wasted words. When he said something he meant it, and rarely if ever had to repeat what he had said. He provoked continuous fear in the entire platoon, and most assuredly did he provoke fear in me. He hated all Southerners, considered them ignorant trash, and he exercised this contempt on me whenever and however possible. I was the only Southerner in the platoon, with the exception of a poor farm boy from

Fayette, Georgia, and we caught constant hell. He worked the phrase, "white trash" to death, and seemed to take malicious pleasure in making me and the Georgia boy feel as inferior as possible. However, he did not succeed, for no one could or ever will make me feel inferior to anyone or anything. I think Spitty realized this. Yet, he took evil pleasure in realizing it, for he was like a hound on a leash, waiting the opportunity when I would make that fatal error and he could spring upon me with his pent-up ferocity. The Georgia boy and I always caught head duty, that special privilege of cleaning the latrines. I have never heard the words "son of a bitch" as often from one person as I heard it that seven weeks of boot training from the boy from Georgia. He hated Spitty with all the hate one could evoke at the age of seventeen, and he let that hate master him. I hated Spitty too, but I used it as a weapon against him, and as a means to eventually show him up and to let him see with his own eyes the genuine stuff I was made of. I was determined to accomplish all Spitty set out for his platoon to do, and do it better than anyone else. I read manuals every spare minute. I kept my clothes immaculate. I obeyed all the rules and with a touch of spice. I kept my rifle as bright as a new penny. Whenever Spitty jumped me I addressed him with courtesy, which always got under his skin. I had read in a novel once about a young man taken prisoner. Within that prison he had gained the favor of the prison keepers by appearing a little neater, a little brighter, a little more alert than the

other prisoners. I remembered this and used it as a means to stand out in the platoon, to have Spitty finally notice me, and to give me credit for my worth. I felt he would eventually do this, for he was devoted, with his last drop of blood, to the Marines.

One day at clothes inspection he discovered a brown stain on my shorts. He ripped my clothes from the line and threw every one of them into the sand.

"Don't you Southerners ever wipe your ass?" he asked hotly, his black, burning eyes fiercely on mine.

"Wiping is unsanitary," I came back innocently, timing my words so that I would sound as casual as I could. "We always wash!"

At that his bright eyes snapped like a startled hawk's. He jerked up his head, placing emphasis on his military bearing, and stabbed at my eyes with his own. I could tell I had touched a sore spot, but I did not let on.

"Then, if you're so accustomed to washing, Mac, I suggest you wash all these clothes ten times," he snapped, his words like cracks of a whip. I did not flinch. "I'll be back later to inspect!"

He did come back. Silently he went through the stack of cleanly washed clothes. He gave them a second inspection. All the while he said nothing, nor did he look at me as I stood at attention. He was deliberately trying to find something wrong with them. Toward the end of his second inspection he gave a tired sigh. His eyes cut at mine. Like a naughty child, he flipped my clothes into the sand.

"They're clean," he said, his voice a little uncertain. "But they're not white. Wash them again. Then report at my hut to say the general orders."

An hour later I reported at his hut and recited the general orders without one flaw. He pretended not to listen. He just sat there at his crude desk, sorting through a pile of papers.

"Okay, Carl," he said after I had stood there waiting for him for about five minutes. He had called me Carl and not Mac. He had never addressed any of the recruits by any name before other than Mac. I had made a few points. "If I find shitty drawers in your laundry once more I'll send you to Camp Matthews and make you work the rifle butts." He nodded toward the door.

Once in the shower stalls he was taking a shower and I was standing before the washroom mirrors shaving. I was naked, and I kept noticing that he would glance toward me whenever he thought I wasn't looking. I pretended to be looking into the wash basin, but my eyes searched him out secretly through the reflection in the mirror. He was admiring my body. He had that cat-at-a-mouse-hole look, and something about his hard-heartedness, something about his dictatorial air had mellowed. He almost looked human, and I could tell he wanted to strike up a conversation with me. I kept my silence and vigilance.

Wrapping a towel about his waist, he came to the basin next to me and combed his hair, careful to slick back the jet black waves which none of the recruits could boast, since our hair had been

clipped close to our scalps the first week in boot camp.

"What part of the south you from?" he asked, finally breaking the silence. He did not turn and look at me directly, but his eyes sought mine momentarily through the reflection in the mirror. I told him, but kept my attention on my chin and razor.

"You're a well-built kid," he continued, giving me a hasty glance from the top of my head to my bare feet. "And you're bright, not like most of these Chicago characters. You could make a good Marine—if you'd set your mind to it."

"Trying to recruit me?" I asked, with a touch of sarcasm. I still had not looked directly at him.

"Hell no," he said but there was no contention in his voice. He shook the comb at me. "Don't kick the Marines, Mac. (I lost my points). It's a damn good living."

"You're a career man then," I added, realizing with what bitterness and scorn a recruit regarded a Marine 'lifer.' His black eyes blinked, but he held his ground. His voice mellowed, and I detected a tremor in it.

"Well, Colonel Carl, I wasn't brought up in a southern mansion with white columns and black folks to do my bidding. I wasn't waited on hand and foot since infancy. I was jerked up in a dead-end street in the Bronx. I scraped for a living, and I know a good thing for me when I see it. I like the Marines."

I saw through him then. I understood why he

hated Southerners. Why he hated me and 'Georgia boy'. He was envious of something he could not understand. He thought that because I was from the south I was born into wealth; therefore his hate was for things he thought I had that he had never had. Yet, in seeing through him, I did not dislike him less. He was still all that Georgia boy said he was and more.

"The Marine Corps has been good to me," he continued. "It gave me a home, an education—in part—good food, clothes, and takes care of my health." He sighed. "I could never do that before."

I knew now why he had admired my body. Born into poverty, he had grown up admiring good health, good clothes, good food, all the things he was denied. In a moment of weakness I felt sorry for him, but I remembered all too readily my past six weeks with this cold-hearted, unemotional, insensitive man, and my aloofness came trooping back.

"Well, you can have the Marines," I said as I gathered up my shaving gear and departed. "The minute I get my discharge I'm going to head straight back to my mansion and my fields of cotton." He instantly dropped his eyes.

From that day on he never slackened his tight rein on me; was harder on Georgia boy and me than any of the others in the platoon, with one exception. He never mentioned the south again, or criticized us for it. I had broken off something in him and he was aware that I knew he still carried it.

The last time I saw Spitty was in the hospital

bay at Camp Elliott. It was several months after boot camp and Georgia boy had broken a leg while at scout and sniper's school. I paid him a visit. Spitty occupied the bed next to his. I asked Georgia boy in half-whispers what Spitty was in for and he answered: "The clap—got it on Pershing square in Los Angeles."

Spitty was reading a magazine when I walked in but, on seeing me talking to Georgia boy, he thrust out a hand eagerly, his black eyes ablaze.

I refused to shake hands with him. It was hateful of me.

"I'm sorry," I explained, and with all the icy sarcasm I could muster. "I don't want to risk contamination!"

He shot me a malicious glare, then glanced back to his reading. He had no hold on me now, no authority to push me around and, instinctively I knew I had gotten even. I had paid him back for all his umbrageous conduct. Yet, I had a share of disappointment. I had admired him in a way, his neatness, his immaculate uniform, his military pomposity, his love for the Marines. All that was spoiled somehow now, spoiled in the knowledge of his sordid physical condition. I wondered how he could, with all his emphasis on health and perfection, fall and forfeit it all for one night's carnal pleasure.

While stationed at Camp Elliott for Military Sketching School, I had nightly passes anywhere within the base and week-end passes in San Diego. One night on Broadway, which was a sea of white

sailor caps bobbing up and down, I met a girl waiting to catch a cab. She was small, with long blonde hair, and her white trench coat all but hid her amidst the maze of sailors. She was carrying a round overnight case, also white, which seemed a trifle heavy for her and before I realized what I was doing, I offered to assist her.

"Well, you're about the hundredth service man who has offered," she said, smiling, "but the only Marine. You win. So here goes." She tossed me the suitcase.

Her name was Tiffany and she was a stripper from one of the clubs off Broadway. She let me accompany her to her apartment, a white stucco Spanish-type dwelling overlooking North Island. It was raining and, not able to whistle a cab, we caught a bus. We were drenched by the time she managed to open her apartment door, but she did not seem to mind. In fact she laughed about it.

Her apartment was large but not decorated with that varied assortment of bric-a-brac one associates with show people. Colorful, yes, but in good taste, if I know anything about good taste. It was not strung with costumes, magazines, dirty ash-trays, and the kitchen was not littered with empty bottles and sticky glasses as in the movies. It was as prim as a school girl's, with everything in its place and had about it that freshness that only soap and water can create.

When I tried to come on with her she looked me straight in the eyes and gave me a flat refusal.

"But—but I thought you said you were a strip-

per?" I blurted out, taken back by her reverse attitude.

"I am a stripper," she insisted, bluntly.

"But, yet you won't," I stammered, disappointed. When I had picked her up I was certain this would be a sure thing. Though I had been reared in the country and not accustomed to big city ways, I was not completely dumb when it came to girls. I figured they were the same all over. I had never touched a girl, not sexually; petting yes, but with these many hard weeks in boot camp, then in sketching school and hearing other Marines constantly talking about getting it, I was ready to try it on my own. And I said again: "You won't—er—put out?"

"No, I won't," she answered, very calmly, but very final. "Listen," she went on to explain. "I strip, that is true. And I take off everything, see? But that gives no guy a reason to take it for granted that I will go to bed with him, because I won't.

I felt dumb. I wished she had slapped my face, instead. I could only stand and stare at her, shamefacedly.

"I'm sorry," I managed to whisper.

"It's all right," she said, trying to put me at ease. "You're not the first to think that. There have been hundreds. I don't blame you. I suppose I would feel the same. Most girls in this profession do go to bed with men. I wanted to be a dancer for as long as I can remember. Dancing jobs are hard to find, unless you have connections with one of the

movie studios. But I do not strip like the other girls. They strip for men. I strip for art. You should be able to understand that. You said yourself on the way up here that you were an artist. I love to show my body because it is beautiful. Nothing is more beautiful than a beautiful body, and in a way stripping is like a nude in a painting."

I nodded; I had never considered stripping in this light before. My love of painting nudes, both male and female, amounted to the same thing.

"My act is not vulgar," she continued. "Nor do I say suggestive things while I am stripping—like that trashy Nefra. Nor do I gyrate my torso, or emphasize sex in any way. I dance a kind of ballet, only without clothes.

As a second choice I asked, refusing to be completely shut out, "Will you pose for me—to paint you, I mean?"

She hesitated.

"You are nice and clean, Carl, and you are clean inside. I can tell," she said finally, her pale eyes on mine. "Somehow, you're not like the other service men I have met, always pawing, always assuming. Yes, you can paint me—but for the sake of art only."

I did paint her, and often. But she would never allow me to touch her or to even come into the room to paint her until she had first draped her body in the position in which she wanted me to paint her.

During the weeks that followed I practically lived at her apartment. I filled every spare wall

with paintings of her, all nude, but I never embraced her or kissed her once.

She loved to put on her blue plastic apron and cook. And she could turn out dishes that would make your mouth water. She did all her own house cleaning, her laundry and sewing. She made most of her dresses for street wear and all of her costumes. She even made her hats from her own original sketches, her gloves and her unmentionables. I enjoyed her, and she enjoyed me thoroughly (almost). Only sex could have fulfilled us. We maintained that understanding between us. As long as I never attempted to cross that barrier she was happy as a lark. I longed to see her act but could never get up enough courage to go. Whenever I thought of her up on a stage, completely naked before all those whistling sailors, I always backed out. She never asked me to go, so I used that as my excuse. I have never seen her strip. (Even after the war when I had docked in San Diego harbor from overseas, I refused to see her strip. Late one evening I was going down Broadway and paused before a life-size poster in front of a burlesque show. It read:

"Madame X The Girl With Sex!"

She had changed her name but the face was the same, even after three years of war. By the title on the marquee I could tell that her act was no longer art. Saddened, remembering the best about her, the real qualities that were profoundly hers, I did not have the heart to go in and see what war and the years had done to her. I wanted to remember her as

I had known her, and not as they had made her...

One Saturday night shortly after I had finished boot training I again ventured alone into San Diego's downtown. Eager to be on the town, free from the Marine base (we were not allowed liberty for seven weeks) and anxious to buy my mother and sister gifts, I went into a small, immaculate Chinese shop. A melodious chime tingled when I entered, heralding a young girl in a beautiful scarlet robe. She assisted me in the selection of gifts. All the time she was guarded by the piercing eyes of an old, be-whiskered Chinaman who sat on a silken hassock in the rear of the shop. He kept his sharp, slanted eyes on her, until I had completed my purchases. Though she smiled frequently, and appeared eager for conversation, she spoke only when necessary to carry out the sale. But when she handed me the neatly wrapped package she included a small note. Once outside the shop and around the corner, I opened it and read:

I will see you, Marine, at your convenience—at the Ginza when you so desire—Sayonara.

I glanced back at the shop, thinking how beautiful she was and how lucky I was. But where the hell was the Ginza?

I stopped at least ten sailors and asked the whereabouts of the Ginza. They only shrugged. For about a week afterward, I prowled that vicinity nightly searching for the Ginza. I had to know. This tiny girl was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen; with her soft, smooth complexion, her shiny black hair parted in

the middle and combed straight back to a knot at the nape of her neck, her slanted eyes emphasized by a tint of dusky blue, her doll-like figure enhanced by that tight silken red robe, slit up to the knees. Like Flash Williams and the lion trainer, she represented something of the exotic, the strange, the colorful. It was that certain something which had always drawn me, beckoned to me. These fancies were my siren songs, the essence of that part of me, that burning fire which made me roar inside like a miniature hell. They promised paradise, even if that paradise was no more than a chance to look.

I went to the shop many times, but she was never there. Always the old be-whiskered Chinaman came at the clang of the chimes and sought to wait on me. I dared not ask him the girl's whereabouts. I knew from the first that he guarded her like a greedy man guards a treasure. To me, she was that and more. I could not blame him, especially with the streets alive with Sailors and Soldiers and Marines seeking sexual pleasure and hoping, boastfully, to find that pleasure among the town girls. The citizens of San Diego refused to let out their young daughters, and if a serviceman was to find relief for sexual appetites he would have to find it in bordellos or among the foreign-born or the bars ...

For some reason I felt that this girl who had given me the note was different. My countryfied mind refused to reason that she handed out similar notes to other service men who patronized her jewelry shop. Maybe it was my ego. I must confess.

I had always prized my good looks, and my small, but nice build. Dared I consider that she saw something in me she failed to notice in other service men? I did.

Then, one night, while on a week-end pass, I ran across the Ginza accidentally. It was a bar and lounge. directly off Broadway. I had merely been walking from one street to another, alone, eyeing the shops, plowing through sailors that were as thick as popcorn in a bowl; in line at cafes, bowling alleys, movie theatres, and bars. Then I happened to see the word *Ginza* in pink neon above my head. I hurried in.

It was a small, dark bar with little visible except a pink light oozing up from a glass behind the bar where a Chinese girl served; and the red embers burning from cigarettes down the length of darkness. Adjusting my eyes to the dark, I finally made out faces along that bar, faces of older men who glared at me from glassy eyes as I sat down at the far end and ordered a beer. I was no drinker, so I sat and sipped it sparingly, and looked. The men kept giving me the stares, which made me extremely uncomfortable, and I checked my uniform, giving it a careful inspection, for I thought there must be something about me wrong, or they would not stare. I noticed there were no women. Oriental music poured from the rear somewhere where shadowy shapes moved, as in some mystic dream. Truthfully, I was a little frightened, but the face of the Chinese girl kept coming back to whet my courage.

Then multi-colored lights came on, revealing a small stage at the far end of the bar, and a small band began to play a fanfare, similar to the beginning of an act in the circus. I waited expectantly, my beer glass poised in one hand, while I was still being stared down by the old goats along the bar. And I had the odd sensation that I was sitting there naked, my sex organs exposed for all to see. I had dreamed a similar dream once, standing naked on the corner down town at mid-day. I felt that same way in that bar.

Then, the Chinese girl whom I had sought so desperately, came out on the stage and did a song and dance. I admit that it wasn't much of a song or dance, even to me, a country boy, ignorant of such worldly things. Later, to my despair, I understood why.

When she completed her number she came directly to me and smiling, introduced herself. "China Lee." An odd name, to say the least. But perhaps a stage name, how was I to know? We talked for a few minutes, then she asked me to come up to her room, which was above the bar. I went instantly.

The room was about as big as an outside toilet, and heaped with gaudy pillows, costumes hanging on nails, a tiny makeup alcove littered with spilled boxes of powder, cheap perfume, paper napkins, hairpins, and two wigs. Without further ado she took off her clothes, and beckoned to me to do the same. I hesitated. I had been brought up to feel nakedness was shameful, and I felt this as I watched this strange girl disrobing before my eyes.

She was taped from tits to crotch with wide white bands of tape, and sweat popped out all over me. I asked her if she had been in an accident. I just couldn't see myself going to bed and making a girl plastered with gauze and smelling of a hospital. After all, this was my first piece and I wanted something to remember it by.

"It's all part of the trade, baby," she answered in a husky voice, too husky for a girl, I thought, and she patted me on the cheek. In my mind flashed a vivid picture of my D.I. in the hospital with a disease he had gotten from some woman, and I shied away from her.

As the white tape was unwound, coiling about her feet like a luminous snake, I drew back in shocked amazement. A peter and balls swung from "her" crotch, as the last of the tape was unwound and I saw—as I gagged—that "China Lee" was a boy.

"What the hell?" I managed to stammer, my tongue so dry it stuck to the roof of my mouth.

I could see that (her) (his) face was flushed by my reaction, and he said some endearing thing to me, I do not remember what, but I got out of that room instantly, and raced down the stairs. As I hurried the length of the bar to the street, one of the old men at the bar turned to me and said cocky-like:

"My dear, *that* was a quick one!"

I gave him a mean look.

Not until much later did I learn that the "Ginza" was a queer bar, run by a queer old *auntie* (a

he was called by Marines who frequented the place).

Liberty in San Diego was a nightmare, to say the least. Hundreds of sailors had nightly passes and they monopolized everything. So several of the Marines and I began to spend week-ends in Los Angeles instead, where it was not too crowded with sailors. We could find places to eat, shows, and a bar or hotel now and then. Too, at that time, right at the outbreak of World War II, many families posted their names and addresses on bulletin boards in railway and bus stations so any serviceman, if he wanted, could spend Sunday with them, and occasional week-ends if the families desired. This was the American way of trying to make the serviceman feel at home. I came to find out later that this was not all it was cracked up to be, though most of these families were honest in their gestures.

One lonely Sunday morning I selected a name and decided to go see one of the families. I had heard other Marines boasting of families who had rolled out the carpet for them, and treated them like kings.

It had been a long time since I had put my feet under a dining room table, or felt white sheets in a soft bed and I was lonesome for family folks, not the momentary relations with strangers at bars, girls behind counters, old men seeking pleasure, and the crap most Marines passed out.

The family I selected was named Hughes, and they had a swank home in a clean suburb north of

Los Angeles. They had only one son, Allen, who was also a Marine, and he too was spending that week-end at home. Of course we had much to discuss, and the family made me feel right at home.

Allen was a good-looking boy, a year or two older than I, and he made me think of Flash Williams, the man at the motordrome. He had been out of Boot Camp for some time, and was a physical instructor at Camp Pendleton. Like his parents, he was open and warm hearted, and made friends easily. In fact, being there that first Sunday made me feel that I had known them a long time.

Allen was blessed with a natural charm that could have won over the hardest of hearts and he had a way of looking at me with his cornflower-blue eyes that I could not quite comprehend. Later I understood. He weighed about one hundred and eighty, all hard muscle and had huge, smooth-skinned hands, powerful enough to grip something and tear it apart. He walked like a panther on velvet. There was a mop of thick, wooly curls on his head, copper colored; and his eyelashes were long, his eyebrows thick and expressive. Too, there was about his lips something which enhanced his male beauty, reminding me of Edward, my cousin, and I found myself watching the movement of his lips when he talked to me. I noticed too, that he had a habit of agreeing with everything I said, nodding when I talked, and smiling occasionally, whether what I said was humorous or not. I could describe him with one word . . . warm.

After a turkey dinner we drove with his parents

to the Hollywood Canteen. I had always loved the stars, knew their family life by heart, and could name most of the movies in which they had performed. I was elated. Allen and I ventured into the canteen, talked to Ginger Rogers, Gary Cooper, Mary Astor, Herbert Marshall, and best and most thrilling to me, I got to dance with Bette Davis.

Driving home, I was all excited that I had brushed elbows with so many movie stars, and I chattered like a magpie. Allen listened patiently, smiling all the while, and I know now (though I did not know it then), this loose, airy chatter was spurring him on, provoking something within him I was later to know but at the moment was ignorant of. In other words, I represented something to him, or sparked something within him, some hunger or desire, of which I had not the slightest inkling. My excitement too, over seeing so many movie stars, was bringing out something in me, something basically there all the while, though remaining buried in my existence up to this moment. Talking to him, added to my excitement, was in a sense, sifting for the both of us our inward sensations, the stuff of which we were really made, though it is doubtful if either of us realized it then. We were courting each other with our voices, and ignorant of what we were causing to flower, each in the other. Many men have courted one another in this way, casual though it appears on the surface, and usually it has remained no more than that—a verbal courtship. But Allen and I put ours into practice.

His bedroom was larger than most living rooms,

even in swank homes, and was furnished unusually for one so utterly masculine. The furniture was white and gold, French Provincial; the spread and drapes of ice blue satin.

When he stripped for bed I could not take my eyes off him. And this was odd to me, for I had observed naked boys all my life—in the swimming hole back home, in the showers after football practice, and many, many naked Marines in barracks. Yet, this powerfully-built man made me tremble, like Flash Williams had years ago when he had taken out his huge tool and taken a leak in my presence.

Thinking back, I realize that the nude—male or female, has always stirred within me a rapture I cannot name. A power, especially with the male and now with Allen, that threatens to master me (as he did when stepping out of his shorts) his huge thighs covered with coarse curly hair, stealing over my senses, the turn of his arm, the sudden lazy twist of his small waist, the slight movement which, in a kind of dumb madness, revealed to me the thick forest about his crotch, and the animal shaft swinging like an extended gut, the balls trapped in their ominous shadows, the shadows of his inner thighs, and the wild hair that, like some protective shroud, shields the glory of his maleness.

Easing in bed beside me, I felt his body warmth, like the old coal stove at school, radiating something pleasant and clean, and something wholly attractive. Why I should remember school, worlds and worlds away, I have no way to explain; the

recollection of getting off the cold bus in the middle of winter, and hurrying through the snow to that welcoming stove in the hall, where kids laughed and kidded one another, or just stood with their hands to the iron, enjoying the lovely glow.

I felt this way now as Allen moved in beside me, lifting the white sheet, white as the winding shroud of Jesus, and then letting it float down slowly over us, like a parachute coming down out of heaven.

Something within me was constantly changing now and I was feeling sensations, was being reborn in some special, glorious way, my naked body taking on some mysterious addition, as if my physical form was in the throes of change. Lying beside this magnificent person, my callow mind drew on my past and wildly, swiftly, as if on dark wings, I thought it was Edward beside me, the light of his smoking playing out the glory of his naked form, like the glow on a luminous stage. I wondered, hoping too, that Allen would turn and lay his thigh over my body, as Edward had done long ago, and in thinking this, and in longing for this, something magical stirred within me, making me feel young and strong and innocent again, filled with the grand fires of curiosity, the pain of not knowing, and the tingles of fear.

Up to this moment I had never considered myself strange in the least. Country people, country-born and country-reared, have a natural curiosity about people, and that curiosity, though it does not limit itself to the natural, does not recognize the strange when it is alien to their environment.

Now, with the warmth of Allen beside me, a stranger really, but a being in my subconscious from the cradle up, a change was making itself known within me. Something was happening to me, some physical thing, and it promised to dazzle me, to fling out of me my old sensations, my old drab past with girls and thinking of girls and pretending really, though I had blamed that on my ignorant youth.

I wanted Allen to touch me, like I had wanted Flash Williams to touch me, though I did not know it then. I wanted to feel his hand going over my body, wanted a closeness for which talk and potential friendship could not substitute.

In my desire, my selfishness, I tossed and turned, never favoring one position, yet hoping each turn of my body would, accidentally, place me closer to Allen. This worried me. I fought this desire, prayed it was only a whim, blamed it silently on my image of Flash Williams, my home-sickness, my desire to feel wanted by someone.

Since I had been in the Marines I had heard other Marines talk of men wanting other men, heard their discussions as if from some far off border-line world, not making out what they said clearly, or not understanding, yet glued to the sound of their voices, curious to learn something of the life they unfolded, something that vaguely was a part of myself. In what they had reviled with shame, I sensed no shame; what had repelled them as vile I could not consider vile. Their conversations had only helped mix me up; furnished fuel for

my fears and my silent, intense longings—longings that even I denied existed within me. That urge spoke to me, as if I were two people; myself and the one inside me that suckled my loins like an infant, growing into the monster which was finally to master me.

"You can't sleep?" Allen asked drowsily, turning on his side. He let a finger slide down my naked back.

I marvelled at his touch. Even his finger tip seemed to cover the whole of my body, to envelop me. And why should this be? I asked myself. Why should I glory in the touch of another man?

"Thinking of home," I answered with a lie and, turning my body innocently toward his we merged. Our weight in the center of the mattress caused it to sag, and his dark thigh slid over mine. With a painful stab I thought of Edward, and thinking of him made me feel infinitely close to Allen.

"You can't sleep either?" I managed to ask huskily, pretending not to notice the way he had sidled against me.

"Just thinking," he muttered, "what a small body you have. How did you ever get in the Marines?"

"Oh, the Marine at home who gave me a physical took a shine to me," I answered. I could have bitten my tongue. It lent him his cue.

He moved a little closer, an arm sliding over my chest.

"In what way?"

I tried to think of something.

"Oh—he said I was as tiny as a girl." Then I defended myself. "But I don't look like a girl, do I?" Suddenly, with disgust, I thought of China Lee.

"No, you don't look like a girl, but you are little"—(he ran his hand up and down my side, from arm pit to hip) ". . . and so tiny, makes me want to fondle you."

My heart skipped a beat.

"Bet girls like you," I said, not wanting to, but changing the subject.

"Well, they let me make love to them, like me or not," he answered. "Like this," he added and, sliding over on top of me he began to smother me with his arms, winding them around my neck, up behind my head, his face against my face. "And like this," he kissed me on the cheek," and like this," then the lips, "and like this," on the neck, then my cheek, then again to my lips.

Though I was ignorant then, I could read behind his intentions, I knew that he was showing me the way he made love to girls deliberately in order to make love to me.

I did not resist. Too many hours, days, weeks, months, had gone by with my recollection of Edward doing this to me for me to resist Allen's advances. He was huge, more powerful than I, and his personality already was stronger than mine. With his brute strength, his massive, hair coarsened thighs, his steel-like arms, his weight, he was tearing away, like rain tears away petals of a flower, my strongest reserves. I was helpless. I could no more resist him that I could have considered him

cold or alien. He covered my world, and his groping hands in the darkness, sweeping over my small body, welling up wild sensations, fulfilling long-sleeping desires, weakened me to the softness of pith. I could but lift my arms and, in doing so, they went warmly around his shoulders, to his broad naked back, and his hot lips on mine, again and again with kisses, swept me into a rapturous world —Allen's world and mine . . .

Strange, never to care for such a thing, then all of a sudden, under the influence of one human being, to care so completely and helplessly.

In that instant I changed. I was female. He was male—all male. And like a male, with the female at his mercy, he was fondling me, making love to me, swallowing me with his kisses, on my lips, my cheeks, my neck, down to my nipples, then, raking his wet tongue over my chest, back to my lips again, and then with his tongue into me, finding my tongue, and filling me with life.

In that maw of darkness, that strange room, that strange city, hundreds of miles from home, he was suddenly Edward come back to life; Edward my dream hero, my childhood god, my Alexander the Great; then he was Allen again, my new god, all shining like gold, coming from Mt. Olympus in human form to whirl me out of my senses.

Under the intoxication of his powerful groping hands, the hair on his arms tickling my flesh, I was turned over in the dark, as if I were floating under his power. Then I felt his huge thighs at my buttocks, felt the coarse nest of hair at his crotch

stinging my inner thighs, felt the enormous ramming, then a sharp, needle pain, a pain of fire like lightning that flares through my whole body to explode in my brain.

Yet, instinct is stronger than knowledge, and I realized faintly, through my own unbearable pain that I was giving him, by pain itself, the gift of joy. And I let him enjoy his will.

How soft and tender a man can be, yet so coarse, so brutal!

The hardness of his huge animal body, so thick with hair, with steel limbs and groping tongue, pumping with the regularity of a piston in an engine, his being enveloped me, took me out of the present time and I became what he made me, molding me to fit the will of his desires. In the blackness of that night, where even my senses could not penetrate, he was the god, the creator, and I was no more than clay, being molded and shaped into the form which became his permanent pleasure. My old self fled under the power of his enormous strength. All the concepts of what I once was fell away like chips from a statue, and the new self, the self Allen had made, bowed to him, welcoming his whims, thrilling him with the body he had coveted.

And when at long last, he stopped the constant drumming of his body on top of mine, he finally relaxed over me, like hot melted wax, and all through me gushed the molten nectar of life. I realized, and without pain or conscience or joy, that my childhood had ended, that through the

brutal ardor of Allen I was molded for the pleasure of men.

Still lying on top of me, he turned my face to his and, sweeping me into his arms, the sweat of our bodies pouring freely, he kissed me again and again. Then, with a child-like laugh, or a laugh of seeming guilt, he whispered:

"I'm the lad and you're the lassie, and we're coming thru the rye."

I felt him slip over my buttocks, dripping now in a last reprieve, and with a kind of elated, but hateful joy, I knew that a part of Allen was inside me, the greatest part, the purest part, and I vowed always to be his, as long as he wanted me. I said as much as we lay silently, warmly, in each others arms.

"I'll always want you," he whispered, pecking me under the chin. "From the first moment I saw you—I knew, knew I would always want you."

Had I had a lick of sense, one grain of foresight or wisdom, I would have climbed out of those strong, hairy arms, would have pulled my own body from beneath those luscious thighs as he lay slumbering and satisfied. I should have hurried to a chapel and, flinging myself to my knees, begged for forgiveness.

But the young are hard and selfish, and I was both. I had had a taste of man, the king of the earth, the master of all he surveys, and that taste was like the taste of blood to a wild animal. I had to have more.

To be swept up in the power of naked male flesh,

to surrender to something stronger than yourself to become victim to man's lustful love, the receiver of his throbbing ardor, the cup for his wanton tongue, is too much.

The envious male that is in all males, especially the lesser males who long to be so male, so brutally savage, find with other males, if only for a fleeting moment of joy, the ultimate of maleness.

Allen had shown me what male is, the dominant portion that is male; things in one moment I had searched for, unconsciously, all my life. No wonder I had marvelled at that uncertain, callow age. Allen was the personification of all males who are vastly male, the epitome of the modern savage, the cave man who is somewhere, at sometime, in all of us. Allen had wronged me as no other human could. He formed a pattern, a blue print of the maleness which was to follow me all the days of my life.

THE FAIRY HOUSE:

In later times I blamed Allen for my physical and mental transformation, due to his dominating ardors with me, his constant love making, of which he never seemed to tire, and his powerful pulling, like a magnet, my ways into his ways.

But it was not Allen at all. It was me, myself. It is said that man is what he is through course of accident. This is not so. Man is what he is because he was that from the beginning. And when I had the time to piece my past life together, I came to realize that Allen only made me realize more acutely, more profoundly, what I, instinctively, knew.

Looking back over my childhood, which is gone from me now, painfully gone, the old innocence I loved, the shy honesty that was so great a part of me, my curiosity of life, the things I most admired, the fantastic, the glitter, the glamour mixed with the love of mama and papa, my brothers, life on a southern farm, I see the various threads which fit and weave into the final tapestry.

Playing dolls with my sister, wearing a dress at

Kayro's funeral, my artistic inclinations, being make-up expert at school plays, a knack for designing costumes, my hero worship, the mixture of recklessness with masculinity and good looks, like Flash Williams, being sought after through false intentions—like James, and the old fat man at the country store, the desires for the stripper who refused to put out, the mistaken identity of China Lee, my father's favoritism toward my kid brother, and Edward—most of all, Edward!

My cousin formed the outline of my pattern. Allen filled that pattern in. Edward was the shadow in the background. Allen was the resplendent form in the spotlight. And those others I had admired as a child growing up; the lion trainer; Tuffy, the male prostitute; boys I thought heroic who were on the football team, the look of their bodies under the showers; a Negro, robust and shining black, who went swimming with me and my brothers in a country pond; an uncle who had "played with me" when I was around five, who held me on his lap when he had a hard on; an dmy aunt catching me by my peter, all contributed in their degenerate way to the final form, my image before Allen, the Marine.

And is this not strange? That those who I had always secretly admired, from early childhood growing up, had about them an essence of strangeness, of glamour, a will to mold me unconsciously.

It would seem that each of these people were waiting in line, put there by some will of fate, or God, eager to assist me as I went by them, from

innocence to manhood. The so-called normal had been refused admittance to stand in that waiting line. They, through destiny, were to share no part in my molding, the chiseling on the statue I was later to become. Only those who were tainted in some obscure, jaded way, were permitted to play out a role, however trivial, in my life. Even Flash Williams, so obviously male, so much the gallant hero, the reckless Ben-Hur, contributed in his small way when he chose to take out his enormous organ and take a leak in front of me. That one gesture flung him off his pedestal, and made him, in my eager curious eyes, a flesh and blood being, capable of human weaknesses and capable of provoking passion, which he did in me subconsciously. Even then I had day dreams about the giant size of his organ, his huge figure standing over me, mixed with the wild recklessness of flinging himself around a wooden wall on a spitting motorcycle. Even now, glancing back through the time barrier of my past, I still am awed by the remembrance of him sitting upon that fire belching cycle, whirling it so close to me I could reach out and touch his shiny boots with my hand. He was a magnificent form from that oblique angle, looking at him from the under side, like you see a man in bed, his huge thighs spraddled over the belly of the cycle, his arms out, rigid, taut, as in sexual climax, seeing him as you never see a man on a street, sitting, or even on horseback.

Now Allen became persistent:

He and I had the same hours of duty, though our

camps were widely separated, mine at the training base in San Diego, and his at Camp Pendleton. We shared a small apartment about halfway between the two.

It was the abode of heaven.

The apartment was located over a store which sold swimming, diving, and fishing supplies, and was reached by an outside stairway. The front, facing the sand and the Pacific, had a small terrace with an orange canvas canopy and tile flooring where we spent most of our time when off duty and we could be together.

During that brief, all too brief, happy time, life passed me by, or the kind of life I called a life. I found time to write home regularly, to my kid brother who was then in the Navy, my older brother in the Coast Guard in New Orleans, and another brother in the Army at the Panama Canal, and I tried to write things of normal calibre, but their answers held little interest for me, and they might as well have been stationed on the moon as much as my concern for them was at the time.

At the base I was in training for a military mapping career, picked for my artistic abilities, and was assigned to the R-2 section, Regimental Headquarters. School was from eight to four-thirty, and the minute I managed to get off the base I caught a ride up the coast to be with Allen. He always beat me there, and usually had supper waiting, not that he cooked or did any work in the house. He usually bought the meals already prepared, handled the finances, and other chores required of the *man* of

the house, the role which suited him best, as the role of the *woman* suited me, and naturally so since our sex action fell under this identical category. We never strayed from that sexual position, never experimented with other novel acts which go on between two men, nor did he ever become less masculine or me more masculine. It was profoundly Lad and Lassie as he termed it, and we both were happy with the arrangement.

Too, we never discussed our relationship. It was so natural an enjoyment for us, explanation or discussions on the subject were never necessary, or we thought never necessary, and there were no rivals or competition, to keep us harassed and temperamental. 'True love never runs smooth' did not apply to us. It did run smooth. We both had a hungriness for the other, which could be filled only by the other, and we were truly ourselves, happily content, when we were together.

But as World War II progressed, with more and more Marines being transferred overseas, we became touchy, never knowing when we would be snatched from each other and sent into the Pacific. At times we were almost frantic, but this had its way, too, of bringing us closer together. We counted every second, every minute against that time when we could no longer see one another, and for that reason we made every moment count.

Like pardoned life prisoners, never knowing when a slip would put us back into prison, we walked on tiptoe, clinging desperately to each other's every move, gesture, every word.

At night, if I had to remain in camp for mappin exams I would be unable to sleep and, like thumb ing through a cherished book, I would take out th memory of him, hear every word he ever said to me thumb through our precious moments. I lived it al again and again. Even in class I would find mysel hearing something he had said, some petty thing which seemed to mean nothing, but meant every thing to me. To live without him was a reality I dared never let myself face; a dream I refused to believe. I saw his face constantly. It was always before me, even when I was with him. I could go into another room, and his image would follow. I could see him in my sleep, even though he lay beside me, usually with his arms around me, one leg over my body.

What bliss! What eternal, everlasting bliss! What warmth, what understanding. Was there any other kind of life but this? All remembrances of the old life, the old ways, were gone. There became nothing but him and me, his body, his warm love making, his warm smiles, the warm glow he put into life and into everything he touched.

How calm the mind is when it dwells in the mansion of love. How easy life is to live, when it is impregnated with the love you feel for another. How easy the obstacles, when you have someone to cheer you on, someone who believes in you and what you do, who sees and understands what you are and loves you for it. There are no hurdles in life you cannot jump, no sorrows you cannot outlive, no tears you cannot dry up when the one you love, and

who loves you in return, is there to oil the wounds with a kiss.

Engulfed in Allen's love, I could not imagine another life. I could not remember the life I had once lived. I could not imagine how I had existed before I met him. How dull! How drab! How jaded life must have been before Allen came into it. My mind was incapable of picturing my existence before he came, inventive though I was at imagining. Had I wondered during all my earlier years where he was? What he was doing? Had he loved someone else?

No, Allen had loved no one but me, ever. Profoundly, this I believed. As I had cared for no one. We were meant for one another, born for one another, created for one another. We would always care.

Yet, sure though I was with Allen, secure though I was in the haven of his love, I lost him.

Perhaps, things such as this are too good to last. That is why they are so precious. They come into our lives like a brilliant star and light the way for us for a little while, then vanish, leaving us forever in the darkness, to stumble through life, groping, seeking, falling, only to rise once more and try, before we fall, and fall, and fall.

God should have made two of every human being, so when one is gone we will have the other. It is so cruel when there is only one, for we go on then, seeking for someone else to take their place. But there is no one. Ever!

That is why I know now that life is hell. Heaven

is the one you love and have lost. Hell is what comes after.

I will never forget the last time I saw Allen. It has been branded in my memory with the hot irons of sufferance, that awful curse—memory.

It was dusk. And no where else in the world is dusk more beautiful than it is from the little apartment we shared overlooking the Pacific. It was a Sunday evening. We had been together two days and nights and, after taking a swim in the ocean, had settled out on the little patio with only towels wrapped about us. The steam from our sunburned bodies seemed to form clouds of warmth around us —or was it our love? Allen, sprawled lazily on a couch in the far corner, fairly glowed a deep bronze. His curly hair was still damp, in thick ringlets over his forehead, making his blue eyes radiant, dazzling in the red light.

I had made us a drink and had returned to the patio. Lately, I had begun to drink Vodka and grapefruit juice, an abhorred and unheard of thing back on the farm, but I had learned to do a lot of things since I had met Allen.

"Thanks, baby," he whispered, patting a place for me to sit next to him on the couch. He sipped the drink sparingly, his eyes fixed on the ocean, and I watched him through the eyes of my love, my very soul. He was beautiful to me, as no other thing was beautiful. It was a painful ecstasy to watch him, for you can never get enough. It is like looking at a painting. You are spellbound, in awe, and awed by something you cannot understand. It is like

hunger, when food is before you in abundance, but out of reach.

He turned and laid on his stomach and, sliding over his legs, I laid my head in the hollow of his back. His flesh was still hot from the sun, and glowed with a radiance I could feel on my cheek. He smelled so clean, of salt and water and the maleness which so dominated his deepest being. Along the arch of his spine golden hairs laid like down, and shimmered at each movement of his breathing. There was nothing that I did not love about him, even what faults he had, if there were any, and all the little trivials that go with a person, the little things we had seen in the past and watched for in the future. The way he laid one foot over the other, and one hand over the other, the lift of an eyebrow when you have said something funny. The caressing of his hair with a careless stroke of the hand, which did little to lift it from his dancing eyes, for it fell right back again, curlier than before. His lower lip sticking out when he was silently engrossed in thought. How, when he lay on his back he always lifted the same leg, his right one, drawing his foot up near his left knee. And he always, and without fail, ended the sex act saying "I'm sorry," if he thought he had hurt me, and constantly kissed me on the nape of the neck, his arms folded around my chest until he had entered me. The way he rubbed my spine and my buttocks when it was over, as if in some kind of belated memory of the act itself, conveying with his hands the area which had given him pleasure—Yes, all

these timely, wonderful, casual things.

"The first Marines have taken Guadalcanal—have you heard?" he asked finally, breaking the silence.

"Yes," I answered, sensing the reason he had asked.

"They are shipping more men out everyday. I understand the Third are getting ready. Our little fairy castle can't last much longer." He turned and looked at me—a long yearning look.

"I know," I said, returning his gaze. His eyes were heavenly blue, blue as a cloudless sky, as clean as air, and I could see into and through to the backs of them. They were filled with pain and that pain put me in a state of agony. Even to speak of losing him ripped my heart as nothing else could.

"That's the whole trouble," he went on, laying his face now on its side, his eyes absent, staring, groping. "Sooner or later, baby, my division will move out, then yours, and we will be hundreds of miles apart, never knowing where the other is, never being able to get each other's letters. Oh God!" he winced, screwing up his fists. "Why didn't we both use our heads? After that first night —after that, we shoulda said good-bye, never seen each other again. Then—then I wouldn't have loved you the way I do. Then I wouldn't have cared."

Hearing him speak this way, saying things with a trace of shame in them, a pain stabbed my side and, crawling to him, I squirmed up under his arms, listened to his steady breathing, searched into his eyes—eyes that could be so lonely, so lost,

so desperately lost.

"I am glad we have loved," I said, and I thought how awesome life would be without him, how trivial, how incomplete. "What would I have done all this time, these many weeks, if I had never known you?"

"You would have found someone."

I jerked my head up to see if there was a mocking jeer behind those words, but there was none. He was merely stating a fact.

"I couldn't ever do that," I said, burying my face in the hollow of his neck, and I heard him gulp.

He squeezed me then, the steel grip in his arms all but snapping my spine. His warm lips smeared across my forehead.

"I'd die if you did something like that!"

There was silence then, the heaviness of his breath, the rapid pace of his breathing the only sounds, save that of the waves lapping up against the logs along the sand beach.

Trying to console myself more than him, I said, remorsefully but with a remnant of hope, "They probably won't even send us overseas. Maybe the first can handle it without more replacements."

He made no comment, and his breathing became labored. His arms about me came in a series of jerks, squeezing me tighter then loosening his grip to caress my back with his hands, but there was a tension I could feel, an awareness through the familiar essence of his touch that something was bothering him.

"What's wrong?" I asked directly.

"Oh, nothing," he answered, but after a long silence. Fear pricked me.

"Please," I cried, as sudden pain stabbed through me.

"I've already been called," he said finally and his arms, in an instant, became glowingly warm, as did his whole body as he hovered over me, planting me with kisses.

My heart stopped beating. The world stopped turning.

Wiggling out of his warm grasp so that I could look at him, I stared tearfully into his eyes. Suddenly my tongue was as dry as powder, and clung to the roof of my mouth. Cold sweat popped out on me.

"When will you have to leave?" I asked, sensing the worst.

He leaned and kissed me on the nipple.

"This—this will be our last night together."

Hugging me tighter, he kissed me again and again, then raising his head, his hair dangling in his eyes—eyes remotely sad now, red-rimmed as if from long spells of weeping, he gazed at me. "I'm sorry."

The world fell away.

There was nothing I could say. There was nothing to say. He was leaving. He was walking out of my world, and he was taking everything with him, everything that had ever really mattered.

They say that when the worst comes you can stand it better than previously imagined. Well, the

worst had come to me, and I was standing it, somehow. Though I wanted to drum my heels on the floor, to curse, to cry out at fate, to curse God and die I remained calm. After all, I could not hurt Allen anymore than he was already hurt.

Rising from the couch I went to the railing and looked out at the ocean. Allen still clung to my hand. I couldn't even cry. This was too deep for tears. I just stood there looking out at the night, the silvery lines of water as the tide came in, numbed, conscious only of the void his parting would make of my life in the future. I tried to see my future, but it was too painful to bear. Suddenly, I wanted to go home—home which had not crossed my mind since that first night with Allen.

"Please, baby," he cried faintly, pleadingly, as he pulled me by the hand to the couch once more, and into his arms. As they went around me, building a warm wall around my body, which was shivering now. I realized for the first time, I think, just how wonderful he really was.

I think for the first time I truly understood what this kind of love was all about, the power of it, the awesome beauty of it, the forlorn desperation of it, the abundance of it. I realized how much you could take of it and still not have enough. As Allen held me, his strong arms moving up and down my body, as if trying to clasp the whole of me within his hands, I wondered how I could live without him. The glory of his strength which, in its wildest state, gave me so much pain I would all but faint, yet bask in that pain, for even that pain had ecstasy,

knowing his pleasure from it.

How could I ever live without that? As terrible as that pain is, so realistic no matter of imagining can lessen the fire of it, I wanted it still, for it was Allen's body which brought about that pain, the force of his muscle keyed with his sexual desire, which produced such lovely pain.

"I want you—all of you," he whispered, his lips going over my face with a saliva trail, then down to my neck, my chest, leaving a silver trail in the night. And suddenly, I wanted all of him too, in a way I had never had him before, to siphon my own passion through my mouth and to every portion of his beautiful body.

If this was our last night together I wanted all of him, not just his shaft, but all of him. Yet, as I thought these things, even as I desired them with every degree of desire, he was turning my body in that slow deliberate way of his, rubbing the cheeks of my buttocks, along my inner thighs "where passion sleeps," he had remarked so often, and in my conscious mind I saw his enormous dark organ penetrate me, felt that instant pain that paralyzed my whole body, and the driving force of his own limbs as he pierced the tissues in his wild search. Oh, the glory of this last, for it was to be our last. Every movement to me, however slight, became a new, sparkling ecstasy. The very touch of his hands, gripping with steel, hands which were clasped under my chin, the flat of his stomach, the punctuated area of black hair, massed like heavy wool about his crotch. His legs that scraped like files

against mine, all were sensed in a double vision of reality—because this was to be the last—the last!

That he was rough now, treating my small body like a rapist treats its victim, was understandable. He was trying to take, with this last labor of love, of passion, a supply for all his desires to come. So I loved him more for this roughness. He had my body arched now, almost to the point where I was on my hands and knees, and the awesome pain of his organ beating a livid path through my belly was too painful to be borne. Yet, through my love, I bore it. Now—now for the last drop of ecstasy! His excited body abandoned of all reserve except the call to passion, he was using his torso as a battering ram. His legs went around my calves like coiling snakes, my own body supporting us both, and each down-plunge was like a sizzling hot iron through my groin. Then, all was liquid, a gush of crimson, a spray of molten ballast which filled my insides, and poured into every stream of my being, filled every crevice, seeped into every pulsing vein. In a bath of sweat and spent passion we laid, wound in each others arms, our legs warm as flame, our bellys heaving with spent ecstasy. We lay counting the losses that were to be ours in those black days ahead without each other. Each breath was a lament of our loss, a pillage of accumulated sorrow. And even then, with all our efforts for rapture, our bodies hugged and hung like two whining dogs in a wilderness, we still had not had enough—we never could have enough.

Like a man at a desert oasis who, fearful of not finding water in the wastes ahead, and drinks him-

self sick, so did Allen and I crave the other.

Fate, or God, or the Devil had given us this one night, of all the nights left for lovers in the universe, in all the eternities ahead, so stingy, so jealous were they of our love, we strove to make the best of what there was, minute for minute, second for second. We began to caress each other, with mouths spread wide, with the saliva from within our own bodies uncontrolled, wetting the other, we covered inch by inch of the other's willing form. We became a tangle of arms and legs, as our groping mouths sought every muscle of the other, feeling by touch of tongue every crevice, every dimpled valley of rapture, into nests of dark hair, bathing it with our tongues, then sliding out from the smothering fields of hair and on to some other beguiling portion, and straying—but only momentarily—straying to that dark concave of the crotch where we sought no more, but stayed, gulping like savages, all restraint blown to the winds, all caution, not daring to let go of our living toys until our hunger was completely satisfied.

"How wonderful!" Allen sighed, as we turned our bodies back to each other, lying in a pool of our own sweat, our lips drowned in the others lips, our tongues bruised and sore.

"I love you," he said, and for the thousandth time, his hand cupped behind my head, the other feeling out my spine—and then into that darkness he was gone, and gone from all the darkness of my future life.

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* * *

It would seem that two people in love, even two men, would spend their last night together in a different way. Perhaps talking over their future, or even reminiscing over their past, or bolstering their courage by strengthening each other. But there is a hungriness in men that cannot quite be explained. It is to a degree an urge to devour one's love, to take all, before someone else does, or to satisfy all the future longings in one surge of passion.

At least lovers don't have to resort to an orgy of the flesh, as did Allen and I. Did we love one another more? Was it that in our deep love the grief of losing one another unshackled our morals? Who is to say? Whatever it was, Allen was gone from me now, and I was deeply ashamed for us both.

Yet, and this is the maddening thing, had he come back to me, in some future time, a week, a month, a year, I would have resorted to the same thing. I am certain. I believe that there is a wretched evilness in every man, an evil when kindled by passion that cannot be altered, or adjusted to fit the man however pious, however religious, however sophisticated. That man is a savage still is obvious in his passion, especially sexual passion. It only takes a counterpart to set it loose, to put it into motion regardless of discipline, or society.

Maddening too was my life ahead without Allen. I resolved to become a man. I resolved to put the

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passions behind me, to try, even in my shroud of grief, to pick up where I had left off the Sunday I first met him, and plan for a future worthy of my intelligence, of my former rearing, of the childhood which had abandoned me.

Always overly dramatic, I thought I could temper my sorrow for Allen by wearing that love on my sleeve. I would do great things in remembrance of him. I would have no other lover. I would carry that lost love like a martyr. I would build an altar in my mind and pay homage to the love I had left behind. Though we both vowed to write, to keep in touch, we both realized the chance of our ever getting together was slim, so we took needle and thread to our hearts, and with great effort, tried to stitch back the gash our love had made.

But youth is hard. It is the old who keep homage with their loves. It is the aged who cannot say no.

In my subconscious mind it was Kayro I was burying, not Allen. Allen was alive in my thoughts constantly. I could not get him out of my mind. Alone in our apartment on week-ends, I brooded. Everything reminded me of him. He was everywhere. Once I considered giving the apartment up but fearing he would write to me at that address, I hesitated. Too, I was transferred to Camp Pendleton for Scout and Sniper School and it was closer, so I decided to keep it. But, he never wrote. I became worried, then physically sick. Marine life became a drudgery, and tapped the essence of my patience. For the first time in my life I longed to die, to get it over with. Always before nothing seemed to get me down. Vain, proud of my good

looks and build, I had always managed to keep up my spirits. Now I lost faith in myself. I began to slip. I became sloppy in my dress, which caused me no end of trouble in the Marines. I discovered that a drink or two at night helped.

In my madness I wrote every day, long love-devouring letters of how I longed to be with him, was he ill or well, when was he coming home? There was never any answer.

I almost lost my mind in that long, lonesome valley of waiting. I knew he still cared and, though we had vowed to go forward with a strong will, and to bide out time until we could again be together, nothing could tell me that he had forgotten me. My memory was still too strong. I had not forgotten the feel of his arms around me, his lips on mine, his body taking me, without knowing what all these things presaged. He loved me. Someday he would come back.

I cursed the Japs, the war, the Marines with a violent passion. They were the cause of it all.

Desperate, I decided to call his mother.

"But my dear," she cried, alarmed and laughing all the while. "Didn't you know?"

"Didn't I know what?" I cried back, beads of sweat popping out on my brow, my nostrils flaring.

"But Allen's orders were changed at the last minute," she continued, her voice rasping through the receiver. "Good heavens, son, I thought you knew."

I was frantic!

I asked her again, this time with obvious impa-

tience. To hell with all women!

"He's at Fort Dix," she finally answered. "Some special course the army is giving up there. Oh, I don't remember what kind of course, something about reconnaissance in force, or in masse, or something similar—you know how women are about such things."

Yes, I know, damnit.

"You must write him," she rambled on, "his address? Oh, just in care of Fort Dix, New Jersey. I'm sure he'll get it. And—and Carl, he'll get his commission in September. Isn't that grand?"

"Congratulations!" I stammered, "and all that!"

"Oh, Carl, do come some Sunday for dinner. You know we want you, and Allen would like that. His wife stays here with us you know, and she's dying to meet you. We've spoken of you so often."

His wife!

I wanted to tear the phone off the wall! His wife! Why—I was his wife! His lassie!

Once, when a small boy, I fell out of a tree and landed flat on my stomach. I all but lost consciousness. I felt that way now.

Numb, torn by the fickleness of fate, stunned by Allen's cruel deception, I went back to the apartment. In the dark shadows of the patio I came to the end of life. I saw the cruelty of it all through a mind shattered by grief. Strange, it didn't hurt. I was too shocked for it to hurt. Later, I knew it would be different. Later, during my loneliness it would hurt, would gnaw at my heart, would return again and again to haunt me anew. I tried to think

of him in a new light, an unselfish light. His marriage, his real happiness. But still young, still vain, my body still glowing with the vitality of life, I thought of us in bed together, the way he had made love to me, the manner in which he had applied his body to mine, thought of all the sweet nothings he had said, things which had meant everything to me. Suddenly, I had the deep urge to cry. How could he have done such things without loving me to distraction?

Slipping to my knees, and folding my hands over my heart, I tried to pray, to find the answer with God, who was supposed to know all things. There was no answer. There would never be an answer for me. From time imperial to time immemorial there would be no answer to why some men made love to one, then left to make love to others. It was one of life's great problems, and greater still one of its troubles.

Faith suddenly slipped away, my old innocent faith in the human soul, and something fearsome took its place. Though my love still burned for Allen, and would never go out, I feared, I had truly lost him. Yet, I kept asking—why? why? why?

Though vanity is fickle, youth is easily wounded, and I was wounded to the core. I felt strangely that I had been cheated in some inhuman fashion and trapped by this act of cruelty, had no means of fighting back. I wrung my hands. My whole body cried out for his arms. The whole of my being whimpered for his roughness, for the feel of the fiery pain he could engender in me, ached for the feel of his hard knuckles on my flesh, to carry the

bruises like a medal, to feel the flow of blood from his sharp teeth in the nape of my neck.

Only his roughness could set my tears flowing. Only his tenderness and his callowness could make me feel like a woman, to be wanted like a woman But I had lost him to a woman who would never know this kind of pain, or be thrilled by it. She would never know him as I knew him, the wondrous things about his body I knew, the assault of his savageness. No, she would never come to know these things about him.

And that was the awesome reality. She would live with him. She would bear his children. Yet, she would never know his beauty, the most awesome part, for there lay the great loss.

A CALL TO ARMS:

Swallowing my pride, I finally wrote to Allen at Fort Dix, New Jersey. I tried to sound casual about his wife, and composed the letter as nonchalantly as I could, despite my own burning heart.

Within the scheduled interval I received one from him. It was mailed to the apartment, and I was elated. It was like having it all relived again. I read it a hundred times, always out on the patio; I even put it under my pillow at night.

He missed me terribly, was sorry he had married, was teased into it, he explained, and wished to God he was still at the apartment with me. It was too much after my long disappointment. My hopes soared.

In the weeks that followed letters from him came regularly, always expressing his desires to be with me, begging me to forgive him for getting married, please not to be angry, and that as soon as he could get a furlough he would stay with me at the apartment, and not let his folks know he was so near home.

Reading those perfectly timed letters over and

over again restored my hope in human nature, and slowly mending, I began to plan a life for our future.

It wasn't much of a plan, with the war in full swing, with hectic military training, with him on one side of the United States and me on the other. But his letters kept me alive, and toward December he wrote that he was getting a Christmas furlough.

Overjoyed, I spent every spare moment away from duty fixing up the apartment, buying gifts, decorating a tree, new china, candles, everything possible to add to his homecoming, his happiness. In the hurry and excitement, in my desperate need for him, I completely forgot he had a wife, and my beguiled heart was all forgiving.

On the 20th of December, ten days after my nineteenth birthday, my outfit received orders to ship out. Frantic, I tried to make a long distance call to Allen. I could not reach him. I wrote, explaining everything. I knew my letter would not reach him in time, that probably he would already be on his way by train, and that it would be after the holidays and he'd be back in New Jersey before he received my letter. I knew too that I would have to give up our apartment, and that arriving there and not finding me, he would naturally go on to Los Angeles to his wife and parents.

Now, the fickle finger of fate had really fouled me up. I learned all the curse words. I got drunk out of my mind, went A.W.O.L., and had it not been for my early induction for overseas duty, I would have had to spend time in the brig. Some-

how, though, I didn't care. When I saw couples together, saying last farewells, along the dock in San Diego as I went aboard the S. S. Lurline for ports unknown, I became sick at heart. Of all the people in the world to fall in love with, I had to fall in love with Allen, and forty-eight states and the Marines were keeping us apart.

On that windy, wintry day, as I went up the gangplank, my seabag over my shoulder, weighted down with rifle and combat pack, I realized suddenly, painfully, that I was putting further distance between us, and that the war, for however long it would last God only knew, would manage to keep us apart.

Irresolute, frightened, out of place among men who were unlike me and could never be like me, I felt as alien as if I had crossed a continent.

The S. S. Lurline, a luxury liner, had been painted battleship grey, and converted into a transport ship, (after the war I chanced to see it again in the movie Diamond Head, with Charleton Heston. How beautifully white it appeared then, so celestial I could not bring myself to believe I had ever been one of its passengers.) The R-2 section was quartered in the Chinese Ballroom which was on the first deck, between two wide promenade corridors which opened to bring in a full view of the Pacific.

Rubber mats had been spread out on the shiny floor of the Chinese ballroom as protection, and bunks had been placed on this, three tiers high, and with narrow isles between. I marvelled at the col-

umns in this vast room, made of real fish scales, with gold gilt dragons poised at the remote capitols. And along the walls there were hung huge gold gilt pictures of renowned people who had at one time or other been passengers on this ship, the King and Queen of England, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, an ambassador or two, and several Captains.

Duty aboard was a sot, in fact no duty at all, and I spent most of that thirty-five days at sea exploring the ship. One of the boys in my section, Mirka Ray, latched onto me, because he was small of stature like me, I suppose, and we would take a deck at a time, going from stem to stern.

Mirka was a curly haired blond from Ohio, a farm boy like me, and with all the virtues. If there was ever a boy who looked like a doll it was Mirka. He weighed about one hundred and twenty, if that, with a complexion any girl would have envied, and the most petite features, sky blue eyes, soft pink lips, dainty yet masculine, an almost impossible combination, but he had it. He smoked a curved pipe, which helped, wore Indian moccasins and white athletic socks, khaki pants and was usually shirtless. All the Marines in our section "courted" him, in their own way, as they courted me, usually with bickering, beguiling pranks, light tussling (better still, fondling) for tussling lent the excuse for touch, and constant favors.

Men, I think, have always been great teasers, whether they are in the company of girls or boys, it makes little or no difference. They have to pet *something!* It is man's nature, to pursue, to hunt.

to capture, to envelope, to conquer.

This reaction in the Marines was a godsend for me, for it took my mind off Allen and, with Mirka Ray as a companion, life aboard the Lurline became, in sorts, a kind of belated paradise.

Not that Marines indulged in sex with one another. This was strictly taboo. On occasion a tinge of "queer" was brought into a conversation, but Marines never brought up such a subject in Mirka's and my presence. I thought later, years later, that the reason they did not mention queers was because once the subject was brought up and they heard our views (objective of course) it would have put a damper on their courting us. So everything played out its course innocently, and they were blissful fun to be around.

There is a certain pleasure in being around real he-men who, out of base instincts, treat you as a girl—or—as an understanding boy. This aura of light courtship with men has followed me all my life, whatever the job, whatever the profession. Though I have never been effeminate, my smallness in a way has become a substitute for femininity, and men actually seek me out in casual courtship, and with a protective reaction towards me, which, to say the least, is profoundly flattering. I have always, too, demanded (though subconsciously) men's respect. As with the Marines, their full respect for me was constantly in evidence, as it was with Mirka. In my mind they were the gallant courtiers and Mirka and I the ladies. Of course we never acted like girls. These qualities (if they can

be termed qualities) were lacking. They still are. But there was a difference, somehow. Mirka and I were on one side, the Marines on the other. I remember one incident much later when one Marine, on Bougainville, courted me to such a degree that when he was in sick bay with Jungle Rot and had to be plastered all over with a white chalk like alkali, he refused to allow me to see him in such a condition until he was well again and able to dress.

There were many such examples:

Tom, who brought me flowers while on Guadalcanal; Stanley, who composed poems for me, and about me; Ash, who gave me handkerchiefs his girl had sent to him that were dabbed with perfume; Stanley, aboard an L. S. T. bound for Guam who tried to kiss me, Farley, the giant, who allowed me to bully him, beat him, slap him, kick, and even curse him, because of an inner smothered love; and Spud, who invited me to a hide-away swimming pool on Guadalcanal just to see me unrobed, and more—many more!

The Lurline pulled into Queens harbor, Aukland, New Zealand, and for five months of combat training we camped on the front lawn of an English mansion near the little settlement of Warkworth.

There, I met Thad Hannah.

The R-2 section was housed in two-man huts in two neat rows down the front lawn from the big house, and when we had hiked into the campsite we discovered that replacements for our section were already encamped, awaiting us.

I was assigned to the last hut on the end, at the

extremity of the lawn, and there, standing in the front door with the New Zealand sun shining on his dark, curly hair stood the shades of Flash Williams, Edward, Allen!

What tricks life can plan, and play, and seem to mean nothing by it!

Dark, almost savage dark, muscular as an ox, stripped to the waist, a shave towel around his neck, he stood there grinning down at me, with a know-it-all expression on his swarthy face, his blue eyes saying something like, "Yeah, I know what you are!"

Isn't it strange, that men will know these things automatically? They possess a sense, a seventh sense, something far ahead of our time, that dictates to them, that telegraphs to them the mystic essence of others.

Yet, there he stood in that bright English light, his face cut in a broad grin, leaning against the door-facing, the arch of his bare feet and the disrobed chest telling me, in so many wonderful ways, how the coarse dark hair covered the best portions of his body, and below him I stood, trembling like a thief, my faculties entangled.

We hit it right off, even that first night, for he knew, and knowing, made me defenseless. I could no more have resisted him than I could have flown, and the future in that little New Zealand town promised paradise.

It was paradise.

When it is winter in the United States it is summer in New Zealand. That old mansion on the

hill, with its two story front, long galleries, columns, and tall windows—the lawns sprinkled with bright yellow flowers, with honeysuckle bordering the fence, it made me think of home, of papa's old ante-bellum home, with the exception of moss and magnolias.

New Zealand summers are so balmy, so foamed over with bloom and blossom. Old avenues steeped with shade and evergreens, winding roads over dewy hills, meadows you fall in love with it at first sight, and as you linger, it seeps into you, and becomes a part of you.

Meeting Thad and having him make love to me in this sunny haven, caused me to link him with the place, a part of it, influenced by it, and loved because of it.

I learned he was from Texas, and had that nasal twang to his voice, with lazy, drowsy eyes that, in passion, could turn immediately to a hot reckless gaze, he was like a dandy, fresh from the emerald island, and his clean, even white teeth, when he smiled, his soft lips, his sometimes insolent eyes, his forehead cascaded with curls, dimmed Allen into the far off agony of my past, and into my world came this shining knight.

Not that I loved him. My heart belonged to Allen. It would always, I imagined, even though my body momentarily belonged to Thad.

"If you let another Marine make you, I'll kill you," he said to me one night during the heat of passion, and he meant it. At the time, I was fascinated by it. How exciting to know that someone

cared so much he would kill for you.

It was queer too, in a sense. Here I had a boy far more handsome, more savagely masculine, far more attentive every day and every night, in our little hut with its one window through which we could see the stars, and yet my heart for him was numb.

And this is hard for me to confess, even to myself, which proves the fool that I am. When I was with Thad, during those beautiful starry nights in New Zealand, on that little bunk covered with a Marine blanket, I pretended he was Allen.

And there were other times when not in the hut, his holding my hand in the little movie house in Warkworth, swimming on a Sunday evening at the concrete pool at the town quarry, laying with him out on the dewy hills with the shadowy shapes of sheep grazing in the first light of dawn, hiking to Dargaville, riding the train to Auckland and to Wellington, camping out at Whangarei and Kaipara Hai. Always together.

His presence, and his attentiveness to me, like a holy shroud of protection, followed me all my days and, though I was aware of it, I was to an extent, not aware of it. He was there, and yet he wasn't.

I do not believe if I had been a girl that he could have been more attentive to my needs, my happiness. Naturally, I blamed this on the fact that we were overseas where there were few available women. Marines might make an English girl, but they did not love them, did not attempt to love them. But with Thad and me, he acted as though our relationship was a permanent thing, an established

reality, and with a naturalness few men could have given to another man.

On sixty mile hikes he sometimes carried both our packs, saved his water in his canteen until mine was dry, fixed our chow at nightfall, wrapped me in his body when the New Zealand nights grew chill. And such big, enveloping hands he had, twice the size of mine, and such long, thick legs, his thighs larger around than my waist, and always with such a steady grin, his lips curling to one side of his face to show his even white teeth.

He kept a Stetson hat and a pair of cowboy boots tucked away in his sea bag, and on Sundays he would take them out and wear them around camp. Lord, what a sight!

He could have raped me, and I would not have lifted a finger in protest. Yet, oddly, I did not love Thad. My heart lay somewhere, wherever Allen was, reaching across the many ocean miles to him, and it ached for him, his touch, even when I was folded in Thad's arms, swallowed up by his mouth on mine.

Now, after years, years of meditation and much deducing, I have come to realize that man, of all the mammals on earth, is the strangest, and the most fascinating.

Had I not harbored a useless love for Allen, my blind heart would have seen the light through which Thad's great love for me flowed, and I would have known, would have enjoyed to the fullest, every part of him, instead of muddying up our relationship with my stubborn hold on Allen.

Of course, Allen was mostly to blame for this. His continued stream of long, sad letters kept kindling the fire, and I could not forget him, however desperate Thad's affections and attentions were to me. And without hesitation I continued to answer in return, expressing hopes of our getting together after the war, living together permanently.

One day, during field marching pack inspection, when we had to lay out all our gear for the Colonel's hawk-eyed scrutiny, Thad noticed the pack of letters on my bunk.

"Who's this punk?" he snorted, glancing at the postmarks.

I tried to explain, deftly at first, and innocently.

That was not enough to satisfy him.

He snatched open one of the letters, and with his face to the little hut window, read it from beginning to end.

"You write this fruity punk one more time and I'm through with your tail!" he shouted, his blue eyes suddenly pits of flaring fire. Ripping the letters to shreds, he stomped out of the hut, missing gear inspection, and he had to work extra time in the mess hall as a result.

That night, smelling of pots and pans and grease, he eased into the hut, stripped and made love to me like I have never been loved in my life. Hand it to a Texan! My whole body became one soft, wet tongue, and I thought he was going to swallow me.

After that, though a little reserved, he kept a closer watch on me, and there was a sadness about his eyes. He laughed less, and I realized I had

disappointed him. I think he thought he was the first to ever touch me. It hurt his pride. God! I wish he had been the first!

There was a bachelor who lived on a farm down in the valley from our camp. His name was Lupus —he lived alone—and several times Thad and I had gone down the hill to pay him a visit. He was an ugly old bastard, toothless, prim (too prim) but congenial and extremely hospitable as are all New Zealanders. We were constantly being invited to their homes in Warkworth; they would even stand out on their front laws and beckon us Marines to come in as we walked along the paved road into Warkworth on liberty, or they would meet each Marine on guard post during the night with hot tea and crumpets.

Lupus always served us tea, homemade cake, and wine, and his avid interest in Thad and I inspired our interest in him. Too, he had invented a strange apparatus, a dial like instrument, which he used to track unidentified flying objects (there were a host of these in New Zealand) which especially caught and held Thad's interest.

One Friday night he came up to the camp and invited us to spend the week-end with him. We consented to go.

That night, while we were playing cards, his hands strayed to my leg. I noticed Thad's eyes diverting. Then, like lightning, he kicked both booted feet into the air, hit the table and sent it flying across the room, the cards scattering like wind driven snow. He caught me by the shirt and

half dragged, half carried me across the room and out the door.

Half way up the hill he paused and slapped me full across the mouth.

"I saw what that bastard was doing," he growled at me, between clenched teeth. "Rubbing your legs, reaching—I'll kill him!"

I was completely taken by surprise.

"Jesus Christ!" I flung at him. "Do you think I'd let that old goat—do anything to me?"

"I don't know," he flung back, his voice like the crack of a whip in the still gloom. "I just don't know. After—after that—that fruit—Allen fellow."

I became a small fury. I slapped him back. The sound rang in the hushed silence.

"Ain't nobody gonna touch me, unless I want them to, understand?" I cried, glaring up at him, noticing that he had one hand at his face rubbing where I had slapped.

"And you ain't—never again! Never." I ran up the hill.

"Wait, baby," he cried, coming after me, his huge shoulders looming up in the half-dark.

He caught me by the wrist and swung me into his arms. He smothered me with kisses, his hands playing up and down my spine, gripping my shoulders, squeezing me to him.

"I'm just jealous, baby—mad, plumb mad with jealousy," he half sobbed, sniffing monotonously, his hot mouth going over me like warm oil.

"You have no reason," I declared, glorying under the spell of his attention. "I'm yours."

I thought of Allen, and the old pain crept back.

"Are you? Are you?" he insisted, his huge hands all the while fondling me, drawing me up to his tall height—me on tip toes, my body melting into his.

"You know I am," I said coquettishly, yet again I thought of Allen, somewhere on some island infested with Japs, perhaps shot, dying, or already dead, his beautiful body dappled with blood.

Catching me under the chin, he tilted my face up to his, my lips just below his.

"Baby, love me. Always?"

I remained silent, looking into his eyes burning down into mine. I had been unfaithful to Allen enough with my body, without being unfaithful with my heart. I thought of his drowsy eyes under their canopy of curls, his face close to mine, his warmth seeping into me like a fine spring rain.

Thad rambled on.

"Listen, baby. I own a little farm near the Rio Grande, east of El Paso. After the war I'll take you there. We'll live as man and wife, forever, like we was married—please promise?"

"Oh, Thad!" I cried, my heart pounding loudly, trying to reach out to Allen, to pull him back into my thoughts, my consciousness, trying to hold together what we had. "You don't know what your saying, Thad. After the war, you'll want some girl, want to marry her, have beautiful little children. You're not like me, Thad, not like me, and you know it."

He jerked back his head, his face dark under the shadow of his western hat.

"Is that what you think? Hell, I don't want a girl! I want you. God! I want you. I'll always want you, boy or not, fruit or not, queer or not, I still want you."

"But you will change—once the war is over."

"Will you change?"

I hesitated to answer. I kept my silence for a moment.

"Oh, Thad," I finally answered, thinking of my early childhood, my wonderful, curious innocence, my wild determination to be a real robust boy, to grow up and be like other men. But I saw through that long transparent chain of years, saw myself as I really was, and I added sadly, "No, Thad, I will not change."

"Neither will I," he said, and his voice sounded so final, so absolute, so sure in his own declared honesty. "I'm man enough to know what I want, and man enough to hold onto it if I can."

What words! What wonderous words spilling over my saddened heart! To live with him for the rest of my life, to have him hold me, love me, protect me. It was all too much to hope for. Or, was it? Memory tore at my thoughts and I saw those many nights with him in the little hut, knew, as any real woman would know, that the things he had said to me, had done to me, came from the essence of his heart. No man could do such things without loving!

I looked up at him and I almost went faint at the steady gaze in his eyes.

"Are you sure?" I asked numbly, swept away

and out of my senses. My head reeled. I thought I was going to faint. "Are you sure this is not Marine overseas talk?"

"Hell yes, I am sure," he answered, and his deep voice above me was flat, final. "Say you love me, and I can live on the memory of that for the rest of my life."

Allen! Oh, Allen!

Suddenly, the thoughts of him made me cold, and I shivered like I was standing alone in a raging wind.

"Say you love me," he pleaded, drawing me closer. "Say you love me, or—or I'll snap your spine."

Suddenly, my senses whirled, and a wild fascination for him, this arduous lover, this tall boy strutted with hard muscle, burst open my heart, flooding me with a yearning I could not understand.

"Say it," he insisted, his huge hand cupping my spine, his lips finding mine, and taking, taking.

"Oh, Allen!" My heart cried, "forgive me! please forgive me!" and in that instant somehow I knew that God heard, and would punish me for such disloyalty.

"I love you, Thad," I choked, under his welter of kisses.

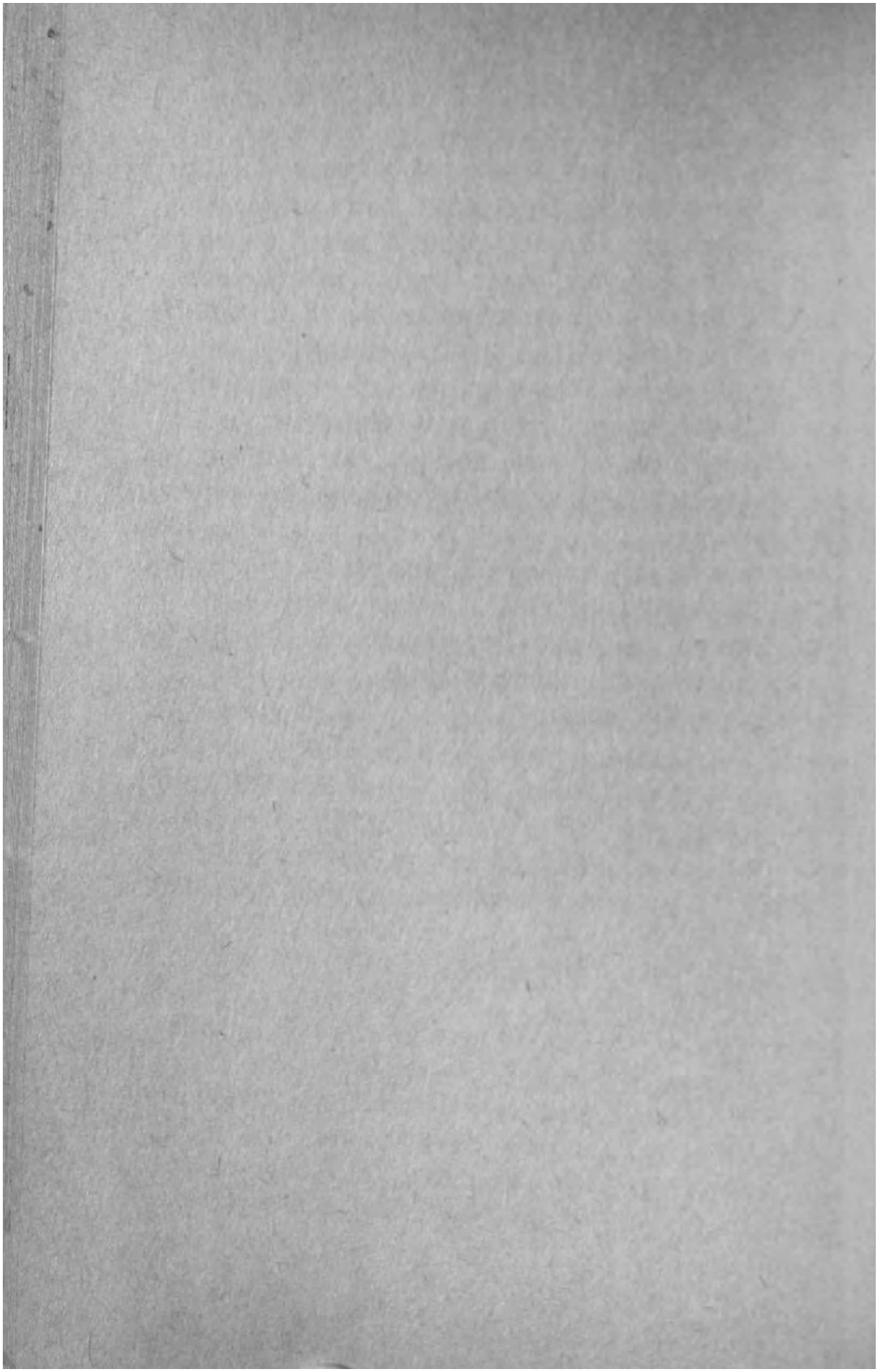
How long he held me there in that pale moonlight I will never know, did not know then. The little road up the hill bordered by a rail fence shimmered all silvery in the haze, and the dewy pasture beyond foamed over with the wooly backs of sheep, and me shrouded by his huge, hard body,

his massive entanglement of arms, his broad shoulders stooped, his face buried against mine.

At long last, after what seemed a moment or an eternity, we tore ourselves from each other, and with our arms around each other's waist we went slowly up the hill, our hearts beset with dreams, vital, but hopeless dreams, with the dark green shrubs on one side of the road looming up like a black wall, and the blue sky opened up with millions of Pacific stars. There was about us, in the hushed movement of our bodies, our feet going through the early dew, a kind of somnolence, a kind of peace.

Late that night, locked in one another's arms, our naked bodies molded as one, there came a sound through the darkness, the sound of a bugle, which started us into wakefulness.

It was a call to arms.



COMBAT:

Aboard the U.S.S. Bloemfontein, Thad and I, along with the R-2 section, went to the Island of Guadalcanal. We made camp in the Lever brother's coconut grove, between Henderson and Carney Airfields.

We left our little love nest behind, much to our sorrow and regret, and occupied four man tents, with bunks and mosquito netting and dirt floors. Mirka Ray occupied one of the bunks in our tent, mercifully, and a Marine named Julian Nelson in the other. Our privacy had come to an abrupt end.

Yet, we had our moments.

There were straggler patrols to maintain along the Lunga river, flushing out wandering Japs who had broken away from their combat units, and practice marches, two to a patrol, through the island's desert area.

Stolen moments along the sand banks of the Lunga at night under the Pacific stars (and they shine no brighter elsewhere in all the world), screened by a jungle fern, a quick kiss while on combat patrols, a touch, a hand hold seated on

coconut logs at an outdoor movie, hugging in a foxhole during frequent air raids, fondling underwater while swimming in the bay between Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands.

Of course there were many times we could only look at one another, and sometimes we could not even be near each other at all, with constant patrolling, marksmanship, command post exercises, jungle marches, maneuvers, and all types of amphibious training to fit us for actual warfare on Jap held islands further up on the globe.

In late 1943 we slid between Treasure and Shortland Islands and into Torokina bay on the island of Bougainville and into rigid combat. For the next month, Thad and I shared the same foxholes, trod through jungle, and during the monsoon season, we moved up northeast of the island to Kahili Airfield, then on to Kara Airfield, flushing out snipers, taking prisoners; mapping combat lines, gun implacements, pillboxes, entrenchments, even as far as fourteen hundred yards beyond our front lines to feel out the enemy, place a fix on their bivouac areas, and report back.

In those crucial times, always wet to the skin, always tired, always hungry, I thought little of my own safety in my great concern for Thad, though shamefully, Allen lay still in my heart like some kind of holy relic, protected, buried, until the time when I could take him out and thumb through all our memories.

Yet Thad was such a great comfort. Looking back on those hectic months, I realize how much I

had taken his presence for granted. Digging our foxhole each night, spreading our camouflage tents to keep off the rain, standing in the rain to fetch our chow, cleaning our mess gear, our rifles, he did everything, even adding to the great willing abundance of his affection for me.

We never had sex on Bougainville (we were always so fatigued from patrols, and tense over the sighting and killing of Japs) but our physical nearness compensated for sex and love making. I suppose it was our knowledge of past affairs with each other that helped to arrest the urge. Too, food was never plentiful and this contributed greatly to break us physically, to alter our faculties. We simply did not have the strength, or the will, not to mention the urge. We both lost weight. We broke out in various jungle rashes, and our beards became long and unattractive. In truth we were ill-kempt, both in body and in spirit, and a grasp of the hand, a peck on the cheek, our arms entwined through the night, was enough.

Though we did not measure this at the time, I am certain the combat itself helped to bring us closer together, and we would have come to love one another, even without sex or ardor or the actual making of love. As many men who grow to feel a strong affection for one another, through the stress of actual war, of being shot at, wounded and hospitalized, and are drawn together under the yoke of a shared physical and mental strain.

Though we hoped to live through that particular campaign and to return safely to the States, and

talked about it and bitched to one another, complaining about our individual hard times, we were not profoundly surprised when, the campaign of Bougainville secured, we were placed on an L.S.T. and sent to Guam, through Adelup Point to head the beach attack on the town of Agana.

Here we spent another dreary, heartsick month, climbing coral hills to Barrigada Mountain, then on to Santa Rosa, through thick, briar infested evergreen, over coral masses, into jungle patches, sugar cane fields, all littered with Japanese.

Then the nightmare—Iwo Jima!

As Thad later remarked: "Baby, this is hell on earth!"

It was hell! A pork chop shaped hell!

It looked something like a scene out of a Boris Karloff movie. Sulphur smoke puffed weirdly out of the bleak, jagged, yellow-brown surface of the earth. Six hundred and seventy miles south of Japan, the Japanese had long regarded it as the bulwark of their inner ring of empire defense, the latch key to their big front door.

There is no such thing as a clear description of the fighting. Words simply defy their meaning in terms we can understand. All that can be said is that 85,000 men—61,000 Marines and 24,000 Japanese, fought until 26,000 were dead, and another 16,000 were wounded, and one of the wounded was Thad.

I knew it had to happen.

It is said that lovers can see forward as well as backward.

Even before our five man patrol had reached the village of Motoyama, passing over that dead and desolate airfield number one, even before three of that same patrol lay dead at the bottom of a cave shaft on the outer extremity of airfield number two, I sensed, with an awesome gorge of pain, Thad's fatality.

At dusk, tired and hungry, our uniforms white with sulphur dust from the pits, Thad and I stumbled through the steaming ruins of Motoyama (once a Japanese health resort) and into Cushman's pocket.

No sooner had we entered than a Jap sniper, concealed in a pit within the mouth of a cave, a Namboo machine mounted in front of him, opened fire on us.

A hot, tracer bullet hit Thad in the leg. He screamed and I ducked, pulling him in with me, behind a protective boulder overhung with witch's fern.

"Dammit to hell! They got me," he cried, his throat choked with dust, his voice hoarse from lack of drinking water, weak from exposure in the hot, arid regions of north Iwo Jima.

In the shadow of the boulder I ripped his pants leg open with my stiletto and bandaged his wound from my first aid pack. I knew that my face was white, drained by fear and shock, and my heart beat against my chest like a drum. Thank God it was only his leg!

"Give me a kiss, Princess," he cried, lifting himself up on both elbows, that reckless, know-it-all

smile raking across his sun-tanned face.

Our sweaty faces came together, the kiss all t more maddening because it was snatched in t very face of danger, of death, the expanding heat our bodies adding it spice.

I remained beside him that night, curled around him to keep him warm, my soul anguish each time he let out a moan, a sob, each time h whole frame shook, as if in a state of D. T.'s.

At dawn, as an advance patrol of Marines filter up, I helped two corpsmen place him on a stretch His blue eyes, like the bright coral sea arou Guam, fixed themselves on me, and he said, pitifully ripping at my heart, "God! when I get y home, I'll never let you go! Never!"

Thanking God for that, I reached out my han as he did his, and we clung there for a wild, despe ate moment, under the corpsmen's curious gaz hypnotized, stricken by a reality neither could a cept.

Sadly, with both our rifles flung over m shoulder, I stood at the top of Cushman's pock and watched as the corpsmen carried the stretch back over the charred volcanic dust toward M toyama.

I forgot Allen then in my concern for Tha This was the first time we had actually been sep rated since that long-gone day when he had stood i the doorway of the little hut, the sun on his fac looking down at me.

Weary, my emotions strung, with hurt and bewi derment welling up inside me, I sank to the whit

dust and wept like a child. Why I wept I do not know, not for Thad, for Thad's wound would heal. He would not die. Not for Allen, for surely he was safe somewhere, secure, waiting, like me, until the end of the war so we could be together. But for the entanglement of my life, I suppose, the rash torment of wanting and longing for soft lips, a reckless eye, strong bronze arms to hold me, a body to close me in darkness and shut out the misery of the world, and having them, it is not enough.

Or, was it from being loved and not loving in return?

Sniffing, wiping my eyes on my sleeve, I slowly got up and started the slow trek back to my section. I was alone now, alone for the first time since the war, and suddenly I was glad, glad to be free of Thad's stifling love, of memories of Allen, of the tired burden of holding onto his love, keeping it alive for us, the burden and strain of holding it intact.

After a month of additional fighting, on to airfield number three, and last to Kitano Point. By way of the U.S.S. Indiana, I returned to Guam; X-ray island (the code name for Iwo Jima) was secured.

Thad was in the field hospital on the beach of Agana, so one bright sunny day I went to see him.

This was the worst of all.

Taking a fresh shower under the camp's improvised shower rack, shaving, and combing back my dark hair until every strand glistened, I wanted to look my best in front of Thad, though I was

horribly underweight, my cheekbones protrudi
my eyes, from long periods of hunger, haunted as
cat's. I put on my clean khaki, threw a poncho ov
my shoulder and started out.

He was bunked at the far end of the hospit
tent, seemingly alone, preoccupied with his priva
thoughts, his face turned toward the ocean. T
tent flaps had been rolled up, for it was a war
balmy day, and he looked so sad, like a little bo
lost from home.

I had found a Japanese sword along airfie
number three after Cushman's pocket, and I kne
he would like it as a gift. I went slowly up to hi
and laid it across his chest. Quickly he glanced u
and seeing it was me, his eyes welled up with tear

"Hello, Princess," he said, blinking, attemptin
an act of courage, his lips quickly slashing his dar
face with a broad grin. He took my hand, complet
ly covering it with his own.

"How do you feel?" I asked, noticing how thi
and drawn he looked, how dull and lusterless h
eyes, and remembering sadly how once they ha
glittered so recklessly.

"Oh," he answered, turning his head away fro
me. "This leg is as stiff—as something else!

"And about half as big," I added, lifting a
eyebrow.

We both laughed.

"I've missed you," he muttered, and his lower li
began to tremble. "Missed you like hell!"

I told him I had missed him too, and the bi
hand over mine closed all the tighter. He aske

about the fighting on Iwo Jima since he was wounded, and tried to make small talk, but it was no good. He came right back to me.

"Wish to God I could grab you and hold and kiss you right here," he said, twisting his lower lip in an ugly grimace.

I tried to comfort him.

"That day will come soon," I assured him, easing my hand out of his. The other wounded Marines were looking our way.

"What makes you say that," he cried, annoyed. "With me bedridden, and no hope in sight of me getting out of this hot bunk. Jesus Christ! What a fix I'm in, stuck in this stinking tent, can't even walk, and to think I been breaking horses all my life. Not one scratch never, and now this!"

He pointed doggedly to his bandaged leg.

"You'll walk in time," I said. "You should be thankful, Thad. It coulda been your head."

"You woulda liked that, wouldn't you?"

I jumped.

"That's not fair," I said, hurt. "You know I wouldn't. You know I'd hate it, maybe more than you."

He looked at me, his blue eyes blazing.

"What good am I to you? Cain't do nothing. Helpless as a castrated bull. How can I do you any good?"

"Do you think that's all we mean to each other?"

He turned his face away.

"Now you can go to that fairy—Allen, or what-

ever his name is; spark it up with him."

He ripped open another wound, one I had tr to heal.

"I wouldn't do that, Thad," I muttered, try to remain calm. "I realize your pride is hurt, cause you've been hit, but you won't be in h forever. I'll be waiting, when you are ready."

Daringly, I let my hand slide over his neck, fingers toying with his lips. He could be so madd ingly charming when he was angry or defiant. jerked his face away.

"When have you heard from him last?"

"I haven't heard," I answered, and I thought the long months without hearing. "A long time. I been a long time."

I bowed my head. I knew he was staring, and couldn't bear to see his tormented eyes.

"Look at me," he demanded, his voice har spiteful.

I lifted my eyes.

"Do you want this—this Allen?"

I shook my head.

"If you do, if you really want him, really ca now that I'm no good, you're free. You can ha him."

"I don't want him," I cried, dropping my ey again.

"Then what—what do you want?"

"I want you to get well. I want us to go home, that house near El Paso."

His eyes were malicious, gleaming like sha swords. "I bet you do. I bet the HELL you do!"

I was dumbfounded, at a loss for words. He had changed.

With the weariness of it all welling up inside me, after waiting so long to see him, I dropped my head in my hands and began to cry. I couldn't help it. The tears flooded down my face in wild streams. I had no restraint, despite the other Marines staring at us.

"What—what you crying about?"

I choked, swallowed hard, and tried to control myself.

"It's just that, when you were wounded, and I was by myself, and all the fighting, I was afraid I'd never see you again. When I got back here to Guam, and found out you were in the hospital, so near, I just couldn't wait—I just—"

"Oh, baby," he sighed, taking a deep breath, his hand reaching out to me, his long fingers beckoning impatiently. "I've hurt you. What a fool I am, a stupid blind fool. Please! Please don't cry."

With a courage I didn't feel, I lifted my eyes and looked at him, a long steadfast look. I saw the deep love there in his twisted face, in the tears streaming down his cheeks, in his quivering lips, and I had the sudden impulse to rush to him, lay my head on his chest, rest with the balm of his huge hands on my hair.

"Come here, baby," he said, holding out both arms.

I motioned toward the long line of Marines on their cots.

"In front of them?"

"God damn them!" he stormed, the muscles in his neck straining, the huge veins standing out like strutted cords. "That's all they talk about, sex and blowin' and suckin'. The whole God damn place is sprouting wings. Come here, Princess, or am I gonna haf'ta get up and come to you."

"Use your head, for God's sake," I cried, jumping back. "Do you want us both court martialed?"

He dropped his hands.

"Got carried away for a minute. Your damn charms."

"Listen, Thad," I said, my voice a little steadier. "I have something to tell you, and it's important to us both, and I don't want you to forget, or we're both lost."

He remained silent for a moment, fumbling with his nails. Then he looked up at me.

"I'm listening."

"The R-2 section is moving out, going back to the states."

His eyes became wide, and there was that little boy disappointment about his expression, that 'feel sorry' for me look.

"You leaving me?"

"Oh, Thad, I'm not leaving you. Just going back to the states."

"But what about me?"

"You and the others here will follow up on some hospital ship."

His lips trembled.

"And I'll never see you again."

I lay a hand on his.

"Yes, you will. That is what I want to tell you. Now listen. We have got to keep in touch, do you understand? We have got to write, and often. I will be stationed at the training base in San Diego until I get my discharge, or until I am assigned further duties. Let me know what ship you are coming in on and I will be waiting at the dock."

"That's no good," he interrupted. "You know damn well they don't give out ship names over here and, besides, our mail is censored."

I tried to think.

"Okay. I know an apartment up the coast of California, near Oceanside. I'll rent it and be waiting. I'll meet you there."

Taking out a pencil and notebook, I scribbled the address, pausing momentarily as a flame of memory swept over me. The joys I had shared in that little house facing the sea.

He took it and placed it in his wallet. Our eyes met, one long desperate look.

"How can I stand to see you go," he whispered, kissing me with his eyes. "What is happening to us? Once we were so free, always together, day and night. Now, bits and snatches. What a hell of a life." He stopped talking and stared absently at the sea, his eyes filled with tears. "Baby," and he looked back at me. "Don't do something rash. If you love me, if you really care, if you want to settle with me in El Paso, don't go back, don't go back to—"

"You're losing your mind," I said and, leaning, kissed him on the forehead.

"Good-bye, Thad," I muttered, holding back th
tears.

"Good-bye, Princess," he added. "See you i
San Diego."

STATE SIDE:

Before I left Guam for the states, a hand full of letters from Allen came in all at once, and I had a field day reading them. He had been transferred from New Jersey to Camp Dunlap at Niland, California, then down to Guadalcanal (my heart skipped a beat. He was there, no doubt, the same time Thad and I were there) then to New Georgia Island, then to New Guinea, and on up to the Mariana's, and finally Tinian. My God! Just north of Guam.

In fact, on a clear day, I could see the island from one of our hilltop observation posts, and it was there that I spent my last day on Guam, looking northeast to Tinian, instead of at the hospital with Thad!

May God forgive me for that too!

I returned to San Diego by way of the "Burp," a former Dutch motorship (what beautiful boys, those Dutch) and spent that twenty-something days reading, sunning on the deck, and doing charcoal sketches of Marines and Dutch sailors. (This had been a Sunday pastime with me on the islands,

since photos were not allowed to be sent home to girls, wives, and mothers).

My weight returned, my cheeks filled out, and that starved, cat look vanished from my eyes. I managed to get an even tan, and my hair, now long and animal thick, glistened from constant attention. Too, much of the strain of the fighting, the tenseness of nerves, and the little habit type things that all Marines acquire during actual combat, like the twitching of an eye, fumbling fingers, etc., left me completely. Under the balm of this rehabilitation, good food, (the Dutch are wonderful chefs) sun, fresh baths, and piped in music, I had time to restore my love for Allen, to see those days and months, and now even years, as only a knife slice between our last meeting and that glorious time when we would meet again. As I thought of him, at times recklessly, at times, mostly while in the sack, maddeningly, Thad slipped into the background of my life. Each ocean knot that put distance between us brought me a knot closer to Allen, caused me to think of him less and of Allen more.

After all, I thought, Allen was my first love. And he deserved me. And how he loved me, I knew. I could but close my eyes, while out on deck sunning, listening to the lapping of the waters on the hull of the ship, the Pacific sun burning down on my face, and he would be taking me in his arms, drawing me to him, kissing me.

My anxiety to see him now, after all these months, overflowed, and set my heart racing at a deathless pace. And the ship was so slow! If only I

could get off and push! Anything to be with Allen.

My Allen! My forever Allen!

Though I had a roving eye, and who doesn't, I never engaged in conversations that might place me in too friendly a situation with the Marines aboard or the Dutch boys, but one day, when coming up the steps from the latrine, my life preserver flung over one shoulder, a novel of Conrad's "Mirror of the Sea" opened at the page I was reading. I encountered two Dutch sailors on that little secluded apron above, fussing drastically at one another. In fact, they were actually being bitchy, and I walked between them with the triumphant stride of a Cleopatra, thinking how safe I was in the mansion of Allen's love, with nothing of that bitchiness, or faggot exaspirations about it, and even more so with the love of Thad, a man and woman basis, or man and man basis, without the silly pats and slaps and wagging tongues of those gyrating creatures whose vain tenor of life denies them real love, or even the parody of love.

And when I had passed them and went through the blackout curtain leading to top deck, I overheard one of them say to the other:

"Did uh havf to ack lak a gidday Mermaid, Tivvy, just cause that friggin' Marine gave us a pat on the ass?"

Yes, I thought proudly, lifting my head haughtily, how different was Allen's and my love, how natural. And the naturalness of it only made me more frantic to get to his waiting arms.

Hopes too, soared over the fact the war would

soon be over. The Germans had already surrendered, the Russians and the Americans were fighting together as allies off the coast of Normandy, and world waters were safely traveled.

No, the war couldn't last much longer. Daily, over the radio in the mess hall, came victorious reports of the Americans fighting overseas. One evening after chow, the tables had been cleared, the Marines and Dutch alike were seated around playing cards. There came over the pipes a bit of saddening news. The President of the United States was dead.

I remembered Papa always making admirable comments about Roosevelt, for what he did for the farms back in those dark days of the depression.

I arrived in San Diego harbor under a barrage of cheers, with thousands of civilians lining the wharf, waving, shouting greetings, clamoring for their special Marine to come down the gangplank. The Marine band from the base was there in full parade dress, playing the triumphant march.

Of course, there was no one there waiting for me.

After a long, monotonous series of physical examinations, filling out papers, waiting, filling out more papers, waiting, more physicals, there was nothing to do but settle back and wait for discharge.

After three lonesome weeks of waiting, I began to receive letters from Allen and Thad.

Elated, so anxious to see and be with Allen, positive now that when he returned home from overseas duty he would leave his wife, Ina, and

take up housekeeping with me, I rented a furnished apartment within walking distance of the San Diego Marine base, overlooking North Island.

It was on the side of the hill, pink stucco, like something off an Italian shoreline, and boasted an open gallery which brought in the whole of the bay, the training base, and downtown San Diego. It was directly over a small flower shop named the "Blossom Shop" which added to its tropical look, and was festooned at the corners with tall banana trees and a leaning palm.

Inside it was neat and trim, and to my delight it had red tile floors.

Putting my belongings in order, and having my parade dress greens and my dress blues cleaned and waiting, I settled back to greet my *lover*, a regular back street lover, sans all the laws, sans all the unwritten rules of society, sans all the concepts of religious morals. In fact, as far as I was concerned, rules, laws, morals, were unheard of vows attached to some other human society, some other world, some other place. There was no place in my life into which I could fit them, like pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. They would never fit. (They still have not fit, after all these post war years.)

Love, like water in a cup, shapes itself to the vessel that contains it, and this vessel which was the whole, the essence of my life, had no room for man-made laws, only man-made emotions.

Momentarily, life at home on the farm I had left behind four years ago, haunted me; but with a small, unrelated haunt. Though I wanted to see my

family, naturally; somehow, now rapt with the coming of permanent love, I felt they could wait. The farm would still be there. They would still be there. I felt that nothing could destroy that. And secretly, buried deep within me, I knew it was the only permanent thing, the only thing that would last, the rock, the real core of things; it was from that little medulla that I had sprung—the one safe place left on earth.

But now!

Now that I had spent three years in the Pacific fighting, living in mud-filled foxholes, doing without food, wading through jungle lush up to my waist, being shot at, cold, miserable, I felt that I deserved the love, the life for which my heart frantically bled. I had earned Allen. His wife, Ina, had not. It was I who had lain awake at night, in foxhole after foxhole up the long axis of the Jap held islands; I, who prayed that Allen would live, that we could be together again, even while Thad's arms were around me.

I waited for Allen in that prim little apartment overlooking San Diego Bay, painting pictures of him in my mind, envisioning us together, so anxious to see him, to know he was well, to hear him say with his own lips, not by written words, that which I longed to hear. I felt that I could forgive him anything.

I did not consider the consequences of Ina, his parents, nothing that made up a plausible "accepted society." I thought only of Allen and me, in each other's arms, in our own private world, and sharply

told that other world to go to hell.

Neither did I consider Thad. Thad was in a third world, not Allen's and my world, not the normal world, but that dim borderline world of the Marines, New Zealand, Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Guam, Iwo Jima, that world; that mysterious, haunting nightmare whose pleasure was only him. Now even that was blotted out by the beautiful face of Allen.

In the unscheduled midst of my waiting, the Atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, and the United States was caught up in the excitement of victory celebrations. Excitement filled the air, excitement with a holiday air, and everything and everyone took on a festive gaiety.

This added to my excitement, my tenseness, and out of this madness, the drinking, celebrations, men being discharged by the hundreds, the trains, buses, automobiles and planes crammed with veterans going home, every highway, every track, every shining rail pulsated with the duty of dispersing Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines to their respective places throughout the United States. Out of all this joyous melee, out of the nebula of all this happiest of mass reunions, Allen returned from overseas.

He called from the base and the sound of his voice over the phone took ten years off my age. That beautiful, excitable, sex filled voice!

All I could say was Oh Allen, this! and Oh Allen, that!

Finally I told him about the apartment.

"I wish I could come over," he replied.

Wished he could come over?

"But Allen!" I stammered. My tone of voice began to change.

"Ina's waiting," he explained, in a catchy voice, breathing hard. "You understand, don't you, baby?"

Oh, yes! I understood! My heart sank. There was silence for a moment.

"Just as soon as I see her awhile, kind of calm things down, then we'll be together, for good," he said, his voice a little more steady.

This only added to my confusion.

"But for how long?" I asked—rather, pleaded. Things were going badly.

"I can't say, to the minute, or to the hour. You know that, honey. You know how girls are."

No, I couldn't say I did.

"It's been this long," he went on to explain, his lips I know too close to the speaker. "A little longer won't matter."

"But just for tonight, Allen," I pleaded, my heart in my voice. "Just for this one night. Then early in the morning you can go to her (I was very forgiving) until—until we can work out something, and we can be together permanently."

He breathed heavily.

"I just can't! I just can't, Carl," he stuttered. "Ina's standing outside the booth. Besides, it's raining."

It's raining!

My God! After all these years of waiting! And it was raining!

I aged ten years.

"Alright, Allen," I said, as calmly as I could, though my heart was breaking. "When you can."

"Thanks," he said, and hung up.

Slipping on my poncho, I went to the barracks and stayed the night. I couldn't bear to stay in the apartment alone.

As I lay on an extra bunk, half-listening to the Marines sitting around jabbing about the bomb, the war, their honorable discharges, I thought sanely for the first time. At least he was alive, and well, and was back home. Somehow, I would find a way to see him, to beguile him back into my ways. That was all it would take, just to be with him one night again, and I'd have him eating out of my hand.

Strangely, I thought of Thad.

And I wondered why I should think of him, on the aftermath of Allen's return home. Yet, mixed up with my visions of Allen, his face kept popping up, that side-ways smile haunting me—And that drawling voice, the way he had of addressing me, always as "Princess"!

Then he, too, came home.

Amid a crowd of cheering civilians, of bands playing, Thad came back to the States, and back into my world.

I met him at the dock, which was more than I had been permitted to do with Allen, and watched him come limping down the gangplank, that Texan grin on his face, his walking cane held to the rear of one leg so that I could not detect it, a Marine directly behind him carrying his gear.

His hand was excitingly warm as he gripped

mine, and those eyes! They were bluer, I'm sure, than heaven's skies as they looked down at me.

We caught a cab to the apartment, and when I helped him out of his tunic, he turned and swept me into his arms.

"I'm still an old crip, Princess," he said, kissing me warmly at first, then maddeningly. "I know you want nothing to do with me."

"Now, none of that," I cautioned, laying a finger along his lips. But I was certain my face was filled with haunts, old haunts of Allen. "You're home," I added sadly. "That's all that matters."

"Do you still love me?" he asked, shyly, like a little boy, and the hoarse sound of his voice cut a gash in my heart. I knew how much he cared, and the knowledge saddened me a little. Yet, I was glad to see him again, his dancing eyes, his slow grin, his strong, dark power which, somehow now, I desperately needed.

"I've got to report into Marine bay first thing in the morning," he said seriously, his face screwed up with wrinkles. "But, after my physical, I'm all yours, if—if you still love me—want me."

"I love you," I lied, my soul cringing for what I was doing to Allen, may God forgive me, and I kissed him softly on the bottom lip.

And so that night, swept up in his arms, his huge body taking me, as in the little hut in New Zealand, I let him have me as he willed, and in a kind of secret glory all my own, that no one else could ever claim, I pretended it was Allen.

In the weeks that followed after that, days and

nights crowded into intervals of eating out, shows, lounges, long nights of love, intervals of frolicking in bed, teasing, watching the clock when he was away at camp, our life together moulded into a unity unconfined by time or place or incident.

Thad was always immaculate in his toilet. Always freshly bathed, freshly shaved, smelling of cologne, his uniform pressed to a tee, and scented from the odor of the pressing iron and scorched wool, of shoe polish, and leather.

No man ever courted a woman with the dash, the gentlemanly manners with which he carried out his paramour with me, and no woman ever received such undivided attention: breakfast in bed, escorted to shows, dances, bars, road houses, swims, lectures, historical tours, museums.

During this period of love, and love making, I received my discharge papers, but I could not go home. I saw Allen on the sly, usually when Allen was at the base, short casual meetings, for lunch in some remote cafe or road house, on a street corner, in the train station, but never with sex, never with a hand hold or a kiss, never with a word of love or affection. Yet I loved him to distraction, with a frantic love which, in time, I altered to suit our relation. I made of him the gallant knight, and our love, one of purity which I carried in my heart as proudly as a general carries a medal. In fact, it lent me a great amount of pride to carry this pure love, holding it secretly over Thad's head, who could be so carnal in his passions. I vainly, selfishly pretended.

During these rare interludes with Allen, only to catch him staring at me from across a dining table, or when our hands touched accidentally, or when he opened a door for me, filled me with renewed hope, thrilling me beyond compare, when once, only the sex act itself could have given me any gratification, assuring me of his love.

It is ironic, when a lover denies all that he has once given so freely, that we rely on so little that he gives. A touch, a glance, the parting of his lips, which we mistake for an intended kiss, the brushing of a shoulder to a shoulder. Ironic, that we can still believe after that, continue to have faith in a love we try to guarantee our hearts cannot be lost.

Even when Allen related in detail Ina's pregnancy, I still sat there, across the dining table from him in that little roadside cafe called "The Sea Shell." I gobbled up the information with the casual air of one hearing about a none too amusing comedy. I had, through the course of our late relation, conditioned myself that with married people these things *had to be* and I failed to attach the physical act of Allen in bed with her to her expected motherhood.

Perhaps the years of being away from Allen had helped to harden me on the subject of sex. I am not certain. But, stubbornly in my mind, he still remained mine, body and heart, though he slept with another.

I did not consider my sleeping with Thad. And Allen was unknowing. I had kept that from him. Naturally, as anyone deeply in love, I envisioned

what would happen should Allen find out. He would surely take fists to Thad and toss him out of the apartment. There would incur a terrific fight (over me) and the winner would take me, overpowering me, to his lair and there keep me at his mercy.

I never took into consideration the difficulty in figuring out the workings of the male mind, not even my own.

One night, after Thad and I had gone to see a movie, and had stopped by a little Chinese restaurant afterwards, we found a telegram slipped beneath the door sill when we returned to the apartment.

It was from Allen's mother, who called me occasionally, and had spent the noon period with me one day while on one of her shopping tours in San Diego.

Seeing it was addressed to me, Thad handed it to me and, going to a lamp beside the radio, I hurriedly tore it open and read it silently to myself:

Ina is ill. Please come immediately. Allen needs you

Signed
Mrs. Albert Hughes

"Bad news?" Thad asked sleepily, his face a puzzled mask.

"It's Ina," I answered coldly, my heart shaping things, things for my and Allen's future. "She's dying!"

"Dying—so young?" he asked, turning his head to gaze out at the bay.

"She was always a sickly girl," I explained. "And she's expecting."

"Are you going to see them?"

"Why yes," I replied, thinking that a team of horses could not keep me away. "Out of respect—you know."

I swallowed at that. What a clever liar I had become.

He continued to stare out the window, toward the bay where the moon picked up the contours of his face.

His jaw was firmly set, and there was a veil of moisture in his distant eyes.

"That makes it convenient for you, doesn't it?" he said, not turning to face me.

"Oh, Thad," I cried with a great showing of pretense, shocked that he could see through me. "How could you?"

I caught the first train north, and when I arrived in Los Angeles Ina was already dead, both she and Allen's son. I stayed for the funeral, trying my best to avoid the sight of Allen's stooped body standing between his mother and his mother-in-law at the grave-side, the scene all the more brooding by the sound of wind through the evergreens, and the sound of a bird that persisted in singing all the time the preacher was performing the last rites.

That night after the funeral, when all the mourners had long since departed, Allen's mother insisted that I remain with Allen. Desperate with

new ambitions for us, mad for this final solution, I faced Allen across the room for the first time alone.

It was his own bedroom, the same white and gold with the ice blue spread and drapes he had shared with me that night long ago during the first of the war. The sight of it wrung my heart.

He sat on the little white and gold love seat at the opposite side of the room, his elbows on his legs, his face in his hands, the light of the bed table crowning his curly head like a golden helmet.

"I loved her," he said finally, not looking up, his stooped shoulders still resplendent in his dark green Marine uniform. "I didn't know at first how much, not till she was going to have our baby, then I knew—knew just how much."

"What about us?" I blurted out, anxious to know, anxious to put things into their proper order.

"Oh, my God!" he muttered, the sound of his voice muffled in his cupped hands. "How can you bring up such a subject at a time like this?"

I jumped, taken aback by the cold note in his words, and the sound of his voice, which had a more profound meaning to me, more bearing on my future, than the words themselves.

I came back persistently:

"But I thought you and I—now that Ina—that she is—"

There was silence for a while, and I could hear him catching his breath, even from across the still room.

"Carl," he finally said, his voice steadier, clearer. "As long as I live I'll never love anybody again—

never—no woman," and he added, almost in a soft whisper. "Or man."

I felt a hollow place where my heart should be, and I stood up. His voice sounded so final, so absolute, and a sense of doom flooded the beautiful room. I tried to think, to reason with myself, tried to latch onto something desperately, some word by hook or crook that would snap him out of his doldrums, that would make him look up, to see me there so helplessly miserable, and to want me and my waiting love.

I glanced at the bed, the silky spread folded back neatly to reveal the white sheets, the smooth pillows, and my mind came to dwell on that first night with him, and I cried out desperately, longing to hurt him, as he was hurting me:

"You never loved me, Allen, never. Nothing but lies! All you ever wanted of me was my tail!"

He looked up then, and his eyes burned into mine. I expected to see a hurt look there, but there was none. It was a look that had about it a cold glare of hate, and I cringed at the sight of it.

"I want you to get out of this house, and never come back," he said, and there was something final in the sound of his voice, something that chilled my heart to the bone, and I saw in a white flash how untimely had been my effort to win his love, to call back a love I thought would never die, but was long since dead.

"I'm going," I said then, picking up my overcoat. "Never mind showing me to the door. It's just that—that—" I fumbled, as tears welled up

within me.

"Just what?" he asked gravely.

"Just that I cared so much, Allen, and thought you cared."

"I did care," he explained hoarsely. "Once," and he choked. "Once, I did care."

My heart died a little at his use of the past tense, and I asked numbly, braved to ask, to relieve somewhat the agony that gnawed in my heart:

"Then, what happened?"

He rose and came to where I was standing.

"I don't know, not really. Marriage, I suppose. I suppose then I found out, really knew that a life like ours couldn't last, wasn't meant to last."

"But why did you keep writing, keep pretending?"

He dropped his eyes.

"Afraid, I guess, afraid Ina and I wouldn't make it, and—and that you'd find somebody else, and I'd lose you, too."

A spark of hope flamed in my dying heart. For a desperate moment I wanted to fling myself at his feet, to wring my hands, to curse fate. I wanted to say, "Well, you have lost us both," but I dared not. That would hurt him, and I could not bear any longer to hurt those tormented eyes that looked down at me.

I caught hold of the door knob and turned it. There was nothing else to do but go.

"I'm sorry," he said then. "I wish it could be different, but it can't. It can never be any different."

"I'm sorry too," I whispered, and for the last time my eyes sought his, one long, desperate search.

At that, placing both hands on the sides of my face, he pulled me to the hollow of his chest and held me for a moment warmly, held me for the last time, not with passion, but as a friend.

Suddenly, I wanted Thad.

GOING HOME

I had remained at Allen's parents' home for a period of three days and nights, with the funeral and all, and when the train arrived in San Diego, crowded with service men and wives and sweethearts, it was already dark, and raining.

Desperate to get back to Thad, mad for speed, anxious to speak my love, I did not wait for a cab, but walked that four blocks to our apartment.

When I got to the street corner where the little hill went up toward the apartment, I was drenched, and the street lamps were yellow blobs of light, dim, frosty lights through the fog. I began to run, my heart pounding like a wild animal's after a chase, my eyes glued to the windows, hoping to see a light there.

Thad had to be at home! I cried to myself over and over. And I prayed that he was not at the Marine base, or over at the "Anchors Away" lounge drinking beer, a habit he had acquired lately, and which was getting more and more frequent.

Thankfully, when I reached the top of the hill, I could make out the windows of our apartment,

their light peering through the onslaught of rain, all the water in the world it seemed, gushing down the little crevice between the buildings, and I stepped up my pace.

"Thad! Thad!" I cried hoarsely, frightened, as I flung open the door and stood, drenched, in the lower hall, the carpet a pool of water.

He stood at the top of the stairs, looking down at me.

I ran up to him.

My heart was on wings at the beautiful sight of him there above me, so dry, so warm. He was dressed in his blues, the buttons gleaming gold in the half-light, his dark, healthy skin aglow, his dark hair neatly brushed back, his soft blue eyes kindly on mine.

I wanted him to reach out and take me in his arms, to hold me forever, to bask in the comfort of his presence, but he did not. He just stood there looking down at me quietly, and that sent a wild fear through me—an uncertainty.

"Thad," I cried weakly, my voice a tremble.

"Yes, Princess?"

"Oh, Thad!"

"I read about it in the papers," he said, though without interest.

"She and the baby," I added, coming directly up to him.

"Surprised to see you back."

I looked up at him, my mouth popped open.

"What do you mean?"

He twisted his lips in an ugly leer.

"It's plain enough, Princess. The wife and baby are gone, so you have your lover, with blessings."

My heart began to beat rapidly within my chest.

"I love you," I said bluntly.

He smiled a dim smile.

"That's the old joke of the decade. Allen is the lucky guy, not me, not old crippled me."

"Oh, how can you say such a thing?" I cried out, miserable, more miserable than ever in my drenched uniform. I stepped up another step. I was directly below him, and the pleasant odor of cologne and tobacco filled my nostrils.

One of the emblems on my uniform had accidentally turned upside down, with the gold eagle on the bottom, and he reached down and straightened it for me.

"You're a fallen eagle, Princess," he said low, laughing faintly.

"What do you mean?" I cried, irresolute.

"Well, all the time you've been chasing Allen you coulda been chasing me, and you coulda had me. Now, in your little heartbreak you've fallen by the wayside, for I have a deep suspicion he no longer wants any part of you."

I stood silent for a moment, breathing heavily, thinking how right he was and how wrong I was, and on top of it all my sudden fear of losing him too, and I said frantically: "What does all that matter now, Thad. I've come back to you, cause I know now—I know, now, it's always been you, and I didn't have enough sense to see it. I'm so dumb, Thad, when it comes to people. You know that."

"Hardly," he said. Then, turning, he went into the living room, leaning slightly on his cane.

I hurried after him.

He sat down in his favorite chair, stretched out his bad leg and rubbed it thoughtfully, as if it gave him pain.

I remembered sadly how I had rubbed it so often in bed with him at night. He had said, "Princess, you're a real Nightingale, a real angel," and my soul cringed at the remembrance.

Then, to my horror, I saw his suitcases standing side by side in the middle of the room, the black shine of their leather, their brass buckles gleaming faintly in the light.

The sight caught at my heart.

"Why—you are leaving," I gasped. "Where are you going?"

"I am going to El Paso—going home," he said, his voice flat, factual.

"But why?" I stormed, standing over him, my uniform dripping a trail of water.

"Got my discharge papers two days ago," he answered, not even obliging me with a glance.

"But you can't do that," I said, as if by stating a desire, it would automatically be obeyed.

He looked up then, and his eyes were like glass, like Allen's eyes when I had spoken so harshly to him, and I jumped back.

"Oh, I can't, can I?" Then he shrugged. "Well, I am—tonight."

The room spun in the whirlwind of my misery. I clutched at the arm of his chair, bending still

further over him.

"Oh, Thad! Don't leave me. I love you. I need you. I can't bear to see you go!"

He looked away, and I noticed he blinked his eyes.

"What about Allen?"

"Oh, to hell with Allen!"

There was a faint trace of a smile, a mocking smile.

"I told you once, Princess, remember? Back on New Zealand, that if you ever went back to Allen, or any man for that matter, that I was through with you, through with your body and your heart."

"But I never went back to Allen," I denied, stubbornly.

"Oh, for God's sake, Princess," he said, glaring. "Please spare me your lies and your defenses. Do you think I'm blind? Do you think you and this fruity Allen became invisible when the two of you were together, secretly?"

My lower jaw dropped.

"Oh, I knew what was going on behind my back. I've seen you with him at the Sea Shell, at Millie's place, one day at the bus terminal. And I always knew when you were out with him, that sheep look on your face afterwards."

"But—but, I never loved him, not like I love you," I said, my heart in my eyes, my love for him written plainly on my downcast face. "It's you I really want, will always want."

He looked at me kindly, and there was deep concern on his face, in his pale blue eyes, dull now,

without their wild glitter and coquetry. He gave me a long, painful look.

"Princess, I'm not trying to be hard, mean, unforgiving," he began, his voice like the sound of something a long way off, like something out of my past, not like a voice at all, and I listened quietly. "Back on New Zealand, in our little hut, I fell in love with you at first sight, I think. I think I've always loved you, or something like you."

"But—but I thought you loved women?"

"Well, that's what you thought. I told you long ago I wanted you. I have always been carried away by your type of boy, oh, I don't know. There's something wild about it, I guess. One time in high school I remember a boy like you. Every time he walked by me, with that kind of walk, I always got shook up. Anyway, I fell in love with you, everything about you, and the war, and us together all the time, and every night, well, you were something special, and I wanted to take you home to El Paso, really, and to keep you there. We had so much fun together."

"But we still can," I insisted, thrilled by his words about us, loving me, wanting me always.

"I don't know," he said, pecking me under the chin. "It's dead. It's dead. When you went—when you went up to Los Angeles I said, he'll never come back, and after days and nights of waiting, wondering, something in me died a little, I guess, and what is dead can't come back to life again, ever."

"Oh, Thad!" I cried, my heart suddenly filled with emptiness over his saying our love was dead. I

sank to my knees in front of him, my burning eyes turned up to his, the tears streaming down my face. "Don't say it is over, ever. I love you, and I will always love you, till the day I die. Don't leave me, please! Thad don't leave me!"

I longed to lay my head on his strong lap, to cry out my heartbreak, to listen and bask in the balm of his kind voice saying wonderful nothings to me, to feel the touch of his huge warm hands on my face, my hair, but he brushed me aside and, going to the patio, stood in the half-darkness and stared out sadly at the downpour. The water along the eaves sent a spraying mist upon his fine body, his clean uniform.

I went to him, and stood for a bewildered moment searching his eyes, eyes now turned remote, aloof, with none of the leaping lights in them I had observed so often, had thrilled to, and I said helplessly: "If you care, if you cared once, you must still care—a little?"

"I do care, Princess," he answered, turning to face me. He looked at me kindly, in a thoughtful way, not like a lover, but like a friend, or brother, without that passion, that recklessness, that devil-may-care look I always loved. It broke my heart.

"I think I will always care," he added dreamily, as if he was thinking back over our past, and it hurt to say it.

"Then stay," I pleaded, my arms outstretched, aching for him to take me, but he only stood there in the rain, his arms limp at his side. "I'll work for us, make a living for us both, if only you won't

leave me. I can't bear to see you go!"

"What kind of a man do you think I am, to let you do that?" he asked, his voice determined. "Go home, Princess, then someday, someday when my heart, when my heart has taken a second look, I'll send for you—I promise."

"Will you write?" I finally asked, pain in my aching heart. I had to hold onto him some way, someway that I might hope to get him back.

He nodded.

"I'll keep in touch, see if you need anything." He caught me under the chin. "Give me a last kiss, Princess, and be off, before your charms get the better of me, and I weaken, and stand the chance of breaking my heart a second time."

I looked into his eyes, and there was a faint trace of that old twinkle, and once again came that sideways grin.

* * *

So, with the clicking of iron wheels over the endless rails, echoing Thad's ultimatum, I went home.

And, as mile after mile brought me closer and closer to the gaunt red hills of Mississippi, my agony over my loss thawed and I longed to see home, the farm, the rolling meadows, the cotton fields, the tall columns gleaming whitely in the spring sun, the long, whispering trails of moss, the avenue of live oaks, the dark green Sabel pines, and the red fields, like sea waves, turned by the plow.

Mama and Papa would be there, whom I had

hurt, had disappointed so often in the recklessness of my youth. But I knew, as they had forgiven before, so would they forgive again. And my kid brother, Willie, would be there too. Suddenly, I longed for the old life again, something of the innocence I once knew, the bright curiosity, the eagerness, the wilfulness, the lustiness with which I had once faced life.

Listening to the constant, regular clicking of the rails, half-seeing America sweep past me, the tired gold of sunset and dawn filtering through the train windows, I was taken out of myself. And being taken out, I began to see myself as I really was, the things war had done, the process of aging, the growing up, the hardening for the first time. I saw too, the face of Allen, and I knew that had I really allowed myself to understand him clearly I would not have loved him, and had I tried even half-heartedly to appreciate Thad I would still be with him in our little apartment in San Diego. Allen had loved me as a substitute. Thad had loved me as a boy. So I lost them both.

And again and again, as I sped those sunny miles I could hear the voice of Allen saying: "It can't last, for it wasn't meant to last." And I could hear Thad saying: "I have never wanted a woman. I have always wanted a boy."

THE END

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FALLEN EAGLE

Allen stood tall, dark, and so handsome in the soft twilight filtering into our tiny apartment. I sensed the tension in him. Fear pricked along my spine. Panic touched me with clammy fingers. I died a thousand deaths as he spoke.

"I've been called, Carl . . . I ship out tomorrow."

* * * * *

It would seem that two people in love, even two men, would spend their last night together in a different way. But there is a hungriness in men that cannot quite be explained. It is to a degree an urge to devour one's love, to take all, or to satisfy all the future yearnings in one surge of passion.

At least lovers should not have to resort to an orgy of passion, as Allen and I did. Did we love one another more? Was it that in our deep love, the grief of losing one another unshackled our morals? Who is to say? Whatever it was, Allen was gone from me now, and I was deeply ashamed for both of us.

Yet, and this is the maddening thing, had he come back to me in some future time I would have resorted to the same thing. I am certain. I believe that there is a wretched evilness in every man. An evil when kindled by passion that cannot be altered, or adjusted to fit the man however pious, religious, or sophisticated. That man is a savage still, is obvious in his passion. It takes only a counterpart to set it loose, to put it in motion regardless of discipline, or society.